

The Laird O'Cockpen

By

"Rita"

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3 Vol

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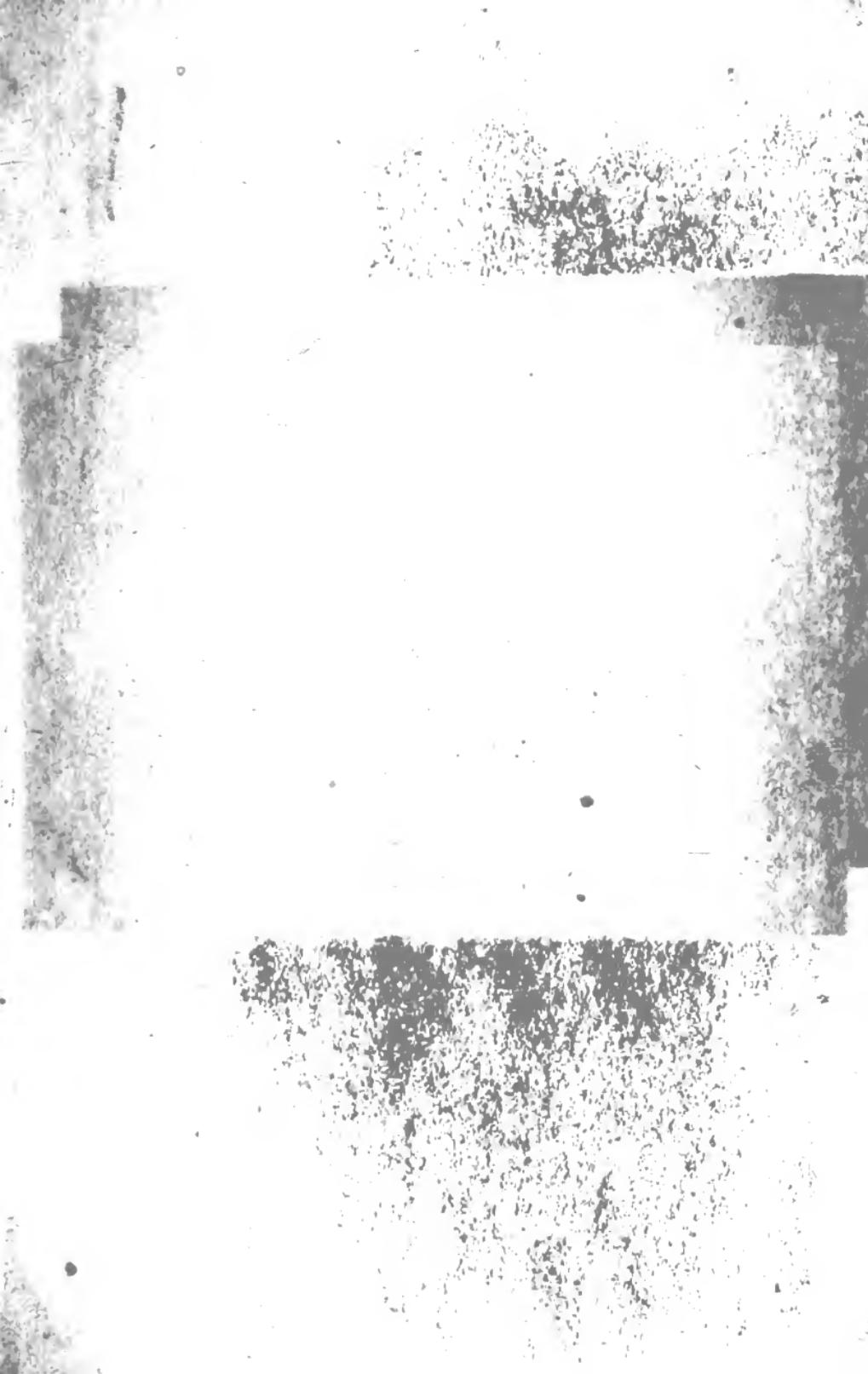
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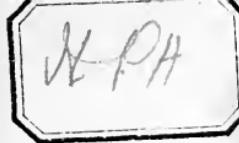
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THE LAIRD O' COCKPEN.



THE LAIRD O' COCKPEN.

A Novel.

BY

“ R I T A,”

AUTHOR OF

“ DAME DUDREN,” “ GRETCHEN,” “ DARBY AND JOAN,”
“ SHEBA,” ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE LAIRD O' COCKPEN.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

“LOOKING BACK.”

“Comfort—comfort scorned of devils,
This is truth, the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow
Is remembering happier things!”

“Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love.”

“JEAN, have ye taken the bit lassie up her
cup o' milk?”

“Deed no, mem, it hae just sleepit my
memory, but I'll e'en go wi' it at once. I
doubt if the bairn's wakin' though, she
was ower tired the nicht.”

The voices roused me and I sprang up
from bed and went over to the window. It
looked out on a small yard, and there stood

Jean the old Scotch servant whose voice I had heard. She was talking to Grannie, who was in the kitchen. I threw open the window and let the sweet June air into the quaint little room which I had only seen as yet by candlelight.

The noise of the opening window attracted Jean's attention. She looked up and saw me. A look of alarm crossed her face—wrinkled and brown as a crab-apple.

“Are ye daft, lassie, to be standing there wi' no covering save yon bit linen stuff? Back to bed wi' ye this minnit. We've no wish to hae ye sick on our hands, and a nice character ye brought too. Aye, but the mistress is gangin' to ye the noo, and siccan a scolding as she can give! But I'm just thinking ye'll be the better o' it.”

I retreated hastily—taking a flying leap back into the little white draped bed, which I had scarcely reached when the door opened to admit Grannie.

Our acquaintance had been short—but short as it was I think I laughed in my

sleeves at the bare idea of receiving a scolding or anything approaching it from the lips of that sweet-faced, gentle, old creature. My father was her eldest son, and I was his only child. He had sent me on a visit to her for two reasons, one, that I was in very delicate health and the doctors had recommended Scotland, the other, that he had recently married again—a proceeding to which I had strongly objected, having even more than that proverbial dislike to a step-mother which the only daughters of widowed fathers are supposed to possess.

"And how is my bairn this morning?" said Grannie, as she came towards me with a glass of warm milk in her hand that she had declared to be necessary for my health while I remained under her roof.

"I am quite well, and not a bit tired," I said, kissing the dear old kindly face bent down in anxious tenderness to mine.

"That is good to hear, dearie. Now drink this, and then you may get up and dress. We'll soon put some colour in those white

cheeks, ye poor wee mite. Why your cousin Nannie—who's a bit bairn of ten years old—would make two o' ye. And how old is it you are, seventeen—eighteen——?"

"Seventeen, Grannie, and three months."

"And nae much to show for it, dearie," she said, smiling. "What will ye look like beside our bouncing Scotch lassies, and your ain cousins, the Camerons, among them? Some of them are sure to be here the morn—they were so anxious to see you. Indeed they wished to be here last night to welcome you, but I said no. I knew you would be tired after the long journey from the South."

She smoothed my hair and kissed me again. I thought I had never heard anything so sweet as this slow, soft speech of hers, with its measured accents and occasional use of Scotch expressions and phrases which were as yet unfamiliar to my English ears.

Ah! how dear and how well-remembered that accent and those expressions were destined to become to me!

I should like to have detained her there

for long. It was new to me to be caressed and petted and made much of, and I possessed a nature which had an absolute craving for love. Not a very safe nature I fear—and one apt to be jealous as well as exacting. A nature that could not but lead to suffering and sorrow in the future, being far less capable of enjoyment than of suspicion, of analysis than of acceptance. But at the present moment my whole heart went out in a flood of tenderness and delight to this grave-eyed, sweet-faced, old Scotch lady, with her gentle dignity, her kindly grace of manner, her fond protecting air of possession and regard, the like of which I had never met before.

My heart had gone out to her from the moment I saw her face and heard her sweet voice, and warm and kindly welcome. I was "her bairn" from that hour. Something for her to love, and cherish, and protect, and care for. A new interest in her life, so she told me, even as she was a wonder and delight to me.

Oh, Grannie, Grannie, I look back on all that happy time of my youth—I, a saddened,

sorrowing woman now—I look back and wonder what you would say if you knew what your “bairn” had suffered. I look back and I think of all your gentle words and kindly counsels, and sometimes, in the long dark hours of sleepless nights, I hear your voice again. How it warned me, how it counselled me, and I, in youth’s headstrong fashion, would only laugh and jest.

I do not laugh now, Grannie, but you cannot know that, for between “your bairn” and you is the gulf of a great mysterious silence—set it seems to me for ever—the silence of the grave, Grannie—that we cannot bridge, though our hearts should break for sign or word of each other.

* * * * *

Poor old tear-stained book—the journal of those days in my Highland home, and among the dearest, kindest folk it has ever been my lot to meet! How strange it seems to me to read these pages, and the history they record. How strange to remember what I was, and think of what I have become!

I opened that journal with a heart as pure, a life as stainless, as its own pages. I think now, as I look on them with a woman's eyes, that the marred irregular lines, and the tears that have stained them, are no unfitting representative of that life's after history.

Grannie soon left me on this special morning—the morning after my arrival at Craig Bank, as her little house was called. It was but a small place on the outskirts of Inverness, but to me it seemed a paradise of loveliness, with its quaint old-fashioned garden, full of fruit trees, and roses, and strawberry beds, and useful kitchen stuff, all mingled together in a fashion that would have horrified an orthodox gardener.

I made my toilet rapidly, and ran down-stairs to the parlour, where breakfast was laid and waiting. The supply of hot scones, and fish, and fancy bread, and marmalade, the thick cream and delicious butter, astonished my English tastes, used only to the inevitable fried bacon and watery milk of a London lodging-house. I made a meal that aston-

ished myself, though Grannie lamented my poor appetite, and was perpetually comparing it with that of "Nannie," the ten-year-old lassie of whom she had spoken before.

I began to feel some curiosity about these cousins. There were a great many of them—ten altogether, I had heard—the eldest being a son some twenty years old, then five daughters, then two more sons, and finally the redoubtable "Nannie" and a small sister of eight, who completed the family. Grannie assured me they would be round soon after breakfast—some of them at least—and I awaited their advent in the garden while she went about household duties.

I had not been there very long when the sound of voices reached me, and old Jean appeared to summon me into the house.

I followed her into the little parlour as they called it, and my first impression was that it was filled to overflowing with a feminine crowd of all ages and sizes.

There was my Aunt Margaret to begin with, who gave me a most affectionate

welcome, then the eldest daughter, Flora, aged nineteen, a fair-haired, handsome girl, who seemed inclined to be patronizing. Then a dark haired, rosy-cheeked damsels, who seemed brimming over with fun and laughter, as if life had never ceased to be one huge joke to her; this was Bella, to whom my heart went out as spontaneously as her own greeting. The others, Maggie, Jessie, Rosa and Nannie, were grouped together in my memory as parts of a whole with no very distinguishing characteristics.

I felt a little shy and awkward at first, more especially as I had to undergo a fire of questions and personal remarks as to which side of the family I “favoured.”

However, as they unanimously agreed it was the Scotch side and not the English, I was received with general approbation. My Aunt Margaret was very kind. She resembled my father, and was his favourite sister she informed me. She was rather inclined to pity me as a poor, weak, sickly offshoot of a very healthy and well-favoured line, but I

took the compassion very indifferently. I knew very little of the family, or the “lang pedigree” on which they prided themselves, and which ran back to the days of the Bruce. But I thought them all very frank and kind, and I liked that slow, soft drawl in their speech, and the faint Scotch accent, which was so apparent, yet which none of them imagined they possessed.

After a while Grannie suggested that some of them should take me off and show me what the town was like, which Flora and Bella eagerly agreed to do. My aunt then insisted that I should come back with them for some lunch or “piece” as she called it, and be introduced to my Uncle Jamie and the eldest son Kenneth; so all this being duly arranged, I ran upstairs for my hat, and in a few moments was walking along to Union Street between my two cousins, feeling smaller and more insignificant than ever beside two such tall and well-developed specimens of young womanhood.

CHAPTER II.

TAKEN INTO CONFIDENCE.

“ The Laird o’ Cockpen he’s proud and he’s great ;
His mind is ta’en up wi’ the things o’ the state ;
He wanted a wife his braw house to keep,
But favour wi’ wooin’ was fashious to seek.”

—*Old Song.*

I AM afraid I was not so much impressed by the beauty of the town as my cousins expected. To a girl who had seen London and Paris, and most of the great continental cities, the little capital of the Highlands as it appeared twenty years ago was not very imposing.

I liked the ancient part of the town best, and the view from the castle delighted me, as did also the graceful Gothic beauty of the cathedral.

Bella pointed out Craig-Phadric, and the singulary shaped hill of Tom-na-hurich,

which was laid out as a cemetery, and where she suggested they should take me next day if I was strong enough for the walk.

“ You are very delicate, are you not ? ” she asked. “ Grannie said so ; you certainly are the wee-est creature I ever saw. Are you really seventeen ? ”

“ Indeed I am,” I said. “ Don’t I look it ? ”

She laughed. “ You look about ten,” she said. “ Who ever saw such hands and feet ? You’re not much taller than our Nannie.”

“ Oh, that’s what Grannie is always saying,” I answered pettishly. “ I don’t know why I should be compared with a child like Nannie. Why I’m quite grown up.”

“ What a pettish wee creature it is,” laughed Bella. “ You’ve been spoilt, Miss, I make no doubt. Being Uncle Jock’s only child——”

“ Indeed,” I interrupted, “ I have not been spoilt, far from it. My life has been very lonely, and I have always had the feeling that I never was wanted by anyone.”

The two girls looked at me somewhat curiously.

“Oh, that’s not possible,” they said in a joint chorus of disbelief.

“Surely Uncle Jock was fond of you,” added Bella.

“Why do you call him that?” I asked.
“It’s not his name.”

“Grannie and mother always called him so,” said Flora, “and everyone who knew him as a boy does the same.”

“Here comes Alick Macpherson,” said Bella suddenly.

She looked at me with a mischievous gleam in her dark eyes. “Look how Flora is blushing,” she whispered. “He’s her beau.”

I surveyed the approaching youth with some curiosity. He was tall, fair, ruddy, like most Scotch youths, and had a somewhat awkward manner. He came up to my cousins and shook hands with them, remarking that the day was “verra warm.” His accent was very pronounced; he had not long left the University of Glasgow, where he

had been studying for the medical profession. They addressed him as “Alick,” though he called them Miss Cameron and Miss Bella most scrupulously. When I was introduced to him he favoured me with a somewhat curious stare, and then shook hands. I mentally pronounced him “uncouth,” but he was a good-hearted, kindly young fellow, and I grew to like him very much as I knew him better. The two girls chatted away very frankly with him. I remained silent, drinking in draughts of the pure, sweet air, and watching the effects of sun and shadow on the Ness.

My attention was at last drawn to the conversation by hearing myself addressed.

I turned and met the blue eyes of young Macpherson fixed on me.

“I was just saying, Miss Lindsay, that I know my mother and sister would be so pleased to know you. Could you not join your cousins to-morrow night? They are coming to drink tea with us.”

“I should be very pleased,” I said. “But I am staying with my grandmother at Craig

Bank, and I'm not sure if she would be willing to spare me, or have made any other plans."

"Oh, I'll walk round to Craig Bank and ask her," he said cheerfully. "She'll no mind. She and I are auld friends, you know."

I did not know, but I was content to take his word for it, and to be drawn into the conversation by degrees, though it concerned people and places about whom I was very ignorant.

Alick Macpherson seemed to know everyone in or about Inverness, and he planned a number of walks and excursions for us if the fine weather should last. As my curiosity had been aroused by Bella's whisper, I watched him and Flora with great interest.

Lovers and sweethearts were to me an unknown species. My only acquaintance with them I owed to books. I cannot say that either Flora or Alick behaved according to my pre-conceived notions. They seemed singularly cool and commonplace.

Presently Bella suggested I should walk round the Castle with her, and she would show me her father's office.

“They'll be having something to say to one another,” she remarked, as she slipped my arm in hers.

“Are they really in love?” I asked, deeply interested. “He looks very—young—does he not?”

“He is two-and-twenty,” said Bella. “As for being in love—well—that I can't well say. He has always dangled after Flora, and he dances with her more than with any other girl and takes her for walks to the Islands. We always look upon that as a sign of ‘intentions’ here. You must see the Islands; they're just a grand place for sweethearts.”

“And is he Flora's only sweetheart?” I asked.

“Well, I wouldn't be too sure of that,” answered Bella. “She's rather a bit of a flirt, in a quiet way, and she's very much admired in Inverness. She went to the

Northern Meetings Ball last year and she was quite the belle of the evening."

"Did you go also?"

"Oh, no; I don't care for dancing. I'm just a 'house-wife' as father says. I have quite enough to do looking after the children and their clothes and one thing and another. I can't spare time for balls and parties; when Flora's married it will be time enough to think of myself."

She went on to tell me then of family anxieties, of her mother's delicate health, and the children's various requirements, of the difficulty of balancing a small income with the ever increasing expenses of a large family, and she left me with a very sincere admiration for the genuine unselfishness and good temper with which she had chosen to take this burden on her own shoulders.

That honest, frank sympathy induced as frank a response on my part, and I told her all about myself. How strange and wandering a life I had led—how unhappy

I had been in my lonely, unheeded childhood —how my father's second marriage had seemed to estrange us more than ever, and finally how my health had broken down and the doctors had advised him to send me to Scotland for six months to try the effect of my native air as a last resource, when tonics and cod-liver oil had failed to benefit me.

“Oh, we will soon alter all that,” said Bella cheerfully. “You want plenty of fresh air and good milk and porridge, that's the stuff for you, I'm sure. Why, you're so slight, I should be afraid to trust you in a gale of wind. You'd be blown into the Canal. And do you ever have any colour? You look like a white rose beside us all.”

“That is very poetical,” I said laughing. “But I am too dark for the simile. I am more like a yellow rose if it comes to that”

“You are a very pretty rose,” she said frankly, “and I expect you'll be turning

the heads of half the young men in the town, before you've been here a month."

I surveyed her in genuine astonishment.

"My dear Bella," I exclaimed. "Pretty! —I—what *are* you talking of? Why, if there's one thing that has been dinned into my ears from the time I can remember, it is that I am hopelessly ugly, small, sallow, thin—why, I haven't a good point about me."

"We'll soon see about that," laughed Bella. "Of course, I'm not meaning that you're very extraordinarily good-looking at present, but anyone can see what you would be once you got colour and plumpness."

"Well, please don't discuss my appearance," I said, "it makes me feel uncomfortable. Tell me some more about Flora and yourself."

"About myself there's not much to tell. You know, in a big family like ours, there's generally one to pipe while the others dance. Flora is different. She is very

clever and, as everyone says, very pretty. I've no talents, and nothing but a knack of housewifery and managing to make me of any special use. But I like it. I couldn't play the piano, or dance, or do anything like Flora does, but I'm a very good cook," she added, laughing, "and I can keep the whole house going with only one servant, and that's no easy matter."

"What a good wife you will make," I exclaimed with involuntary admiration.

"I, oh, no!" and she laughed merrily. "I am going to be an old maid, my dear; I'm just cut out for it; they will always tell you that at home."

"Perhaps," I said, "they only say so in order to keep you with them. If I were a man——"

"Well?" and the merry eyes looked down at mine and the bright smile flashed its light and warmth over the kindly face.

"I'm very sure," I said emphatically, "that you would *not* be left an 'old maid'; I'd give you no peace till you married me."

“ You funny wee thing! I do believe you mean it. Well, I'll e'en take you for a sweetheart, little coz; I'm sure there's a big heart in that small body. Why now, what about pale cheeks and white roses; there's a fine colour! I wish you could see yourself—and, as I live, here comes Kenneth and my father. Look, just leaving the Castle there. We'll go and meet them.”

I glanced in the direction indicated and saw two figures approaching. One was that of a tall, grey-haired man, with a florid complexion and the same laughing, merry eyes as Bella possessed. The other, younger of the two, was a grave, stern-looking young man, of whom I felt somewhat in awe.

With Uncle Jamie I was friends at once; with the grave and solemn Kenneth, I felt instinctively that friendship or familiarity would be a work of time. They loitered on the Castle hill talking to me until Bella announced it was time for lunch, then we parted company and, escorted by the

devoted Alick Macpherson, took our way through the little town to the Macgregors' house.

My aunt had returned, and we sat down to a substantial luncheon, and more cousins came on the scene, and I found myself taken quite warmly and naturally into the circle and getting as noisy and merry as themselves.

Alick Macpherson had gone on his errand to Craig Bank, and returned soon after luncheon was over to proclaim that he had won consent for my appearance at his mother's that evening.

Later on, Bella walked back with me to Grannie's to help me in the important task of selecting a dress for the occasion, and to assure the old lady that I would be taken care of and escorted home in good time.

“The bairn looks better already! She wants young life about her,” said Grannie, regarding me affectionately. “But you must take care and not over-tire her, Bella;

she's but a fragile thing in comparison with you lassies, and I've made my mind up that I'll send her back south looking as bright and bonny as any o' ye—so please the Lord."

Then we went upstairs, and I had to display my not very sumptuous wardrobe to Bella, who decided that the most suitable dress for me was a plain cream-coloured serge with collar and cuffs of dark blue velvet.

"We don't do much fine dressing here," she said, "and, indeed, I'm not sure but that's too grand; however, you'll look very bonnie, and I'm proud to show you to the Macphersons as our cousin from London."

I looked at myself in the glass over the toilet-table and shook my head dubiously.

"Not much to be proud of, Bella," I said, and, indeed, beside that glowing, healthful face and tall full figure I looked very pale, very small, very insignificant.

"We'll see, my dear, we'll see," she answered, kissing me in a sudden impulsive fashion that moved me to throw my arms

round her and cling to her in as sudden an impulse of love and longing.

“Oh, Bella,” I half sobbed, “love me a little ; be good to me. I have been so lonely always—always——”

“Poor wee creature,” she murmured again and again, stroking the wild dark hair back from my forehead. “Don’t fret for that, you’ll win love enough here, I can tell you. Too much, perhaps ; wait till you see the laddies to-night. I’m going just out of pure curiosity to see how they’ll take to you ; you’re just like a wee fairy among all of us great lassies. What a pity we grow so big ; it’s the porridge, I’m thinking.”

“Bella,” I said, suddenly withdrawing from her arms, “I want you to do something for me.”

“Well, dearie ? ”

“Will you teach me some Scotch songs ? I can sing. They say my voice is very good, but I should like to learn some Scotch songs and how to pronounce them.”

“Oh, you must ask Flora that, my dear,”

she said, “I told you I had no accomplishments, and no talents—except for cooking. But, Flora, she’s a fair musician, and I’m sure she’d teach you with pleasure. For the matter o’ that, Grannie would do it—she’s fine at the Scotch music and used to have the sweetest voice possible. Even now we lassies try to get her to sing to us whenever we’re here of an evening. You ask her to sing you ‘The Laird o’ Cockpen’ or ‘The Land o’ the Leal.’ You’ll never hear the like o’ it again.

“By the way,” she added suddenly, “I wonder will he be at the Macphersons’ to-night?”

“He!—who?” I asked wonderingly.

“‘The Laird o’ Cockpen’ as we call him,” she said, laughing gaily. “He’s just the laird o’ the song to the life. ‘He’s gude and he’s great,’ and his mind is certainly taken up with things ‘o’ the State’ for he’s a great politician, and very good and very charitable, and a great pillar of the Free Kirk. More than all, he wants a ‘braw wifie,’ and many’s

the lass that's set her cap at him, but he's not just easy to please, and he's not so young as to be secured easily by just a pretty face and no more. Now, wee coz, suppose he took a fancy to you—my! but that *would* be a fine thing. He's rich, he has a beautiful place called Corriemoor, and he'd make an excellent husband I'm sure——”

“Oh, Bella! Bella!” I cried, laughing, “how you do run on. I don't want to get married. I hate the idea. I've never even had a sweetheart, like you and Flora. I don't think I like men—at least, no man I've ever seen yet.”

“Listen to the bit creature,” cried Bella, laughing heartily, “and she but seventeen! What could you know about men, dearie? I should be sorry if you did too. There's nothing takes the youth and innocence from a girl so quickly as what they call flirtation. But there, I must be going now. I'm sure I shall find nothing right at home, for I've been gadding about the whole day. We'll

come to fetch you at five o'clock to go to the Macphersons'. I hope you won't be tired. But it's not so much of a walk. It's a bonnie place, theirs, just out of the town. And as for liking them—well, Mrs. Macpherson is just the kindest, sweetest body in the world. Everyone loves her. Alick is her only son. He's going to be a doctor, but he'll have all her money one day. She had five children and they're all dead. She just worships Alick, and he's not a bad sort of lad, taking him altogether."

"And does he 'just worship' Flora?" I asked, laughing. "How Scotch you are sometimes, Bella?"

"I'll make you Scotch too, my saucy coz, before I've had you long with me," she answered. "You'll soon give up mincing your words in that affected Southern fashion."

"It's not a bit affected," I said indignantly.

"Ah! now you look fine," she said with a wicked gleam in her mischievous eyes. "I wish the Laird could see you!"

CHAPTER III.

“THE LAIRD.”

“On his head a bonnet blue,
Bonnie laddie—Highland laddie.
Tartan plaid and Highland trew,
Bonnie laddie—Highland laddie.”

THE Macphersons’ house was a very pretty one. The drawing-room had a large bay window looking out on the garden, with its tangled masses of roses and bright flower-beds shaded by ash, and larch, and elder trees.

We were the first arrivals, but the room soon filled, and Mrs. Macpherson, a gay and lively old lady with a smile and a joke for ever on her lips, introduced me to a variety of Scotch youth and maidenhood, whose one striking characteristic appeared to be that of exuberant health and spirits.

Tea was soon announced. Such a tea !

No mere thin wafers of bread and butter here, but piles of scones and toast, and rich cakes, and cream, and fruit, and every variety of preserves, and cold spiced meats for those who liked substantial dishes. And how they ate, those Scotch youths and maidens, and how thoroughly they seemed to enjoy themselves.

When the meal was over we all roamed about the garden and Bella joined me and piloted me about, and explained who was who, and a great deal about pedigrees and “forbears,” which I must confess did not interest me in the very least.

We were standing in a part of the garden that commanded a view of the river over the low briar-hedge, when I heard the click of the gate and looked round to see who was coming. A tall figure appeared, turning the corner of the gravelled walk, and seeing us, lifted the “bonnet” from a head of chestnut curls, and came forward to greet Bella.

I stood quite still, watching him as he

approached. I thought I had never seen so handsome a face and figure.

“It’s Douglas Hay,” whispered Bella. “I wonder at Mrs. Macpherson asking him here.”

I wondered greatly what objection there could be to his presence, but as he was close at hand I had to control my curiosity.

He shook hands with Bella, and I thought her strangely stiff and cold in her greeting. Then his blue eyes turned to me so frankly and questioningly that Bella could not but give the introduction they asked for. As for myself, the “fine colour” she had lauded before made itself felt in my hot cheeks and a strange shyness and embarrassment came over me.

But the frank, gay, cordial manner had an irresistible charm, and even Bella soon forgot her coldness and stiffness as the new comer rattled on, giving a host of excuses for his late appearance.

“I went for a bathe in the Canal with the Frasers,” he said, “and had no idea it was so late.”

"Well, you've missed your tea," said Bella, "unless Mrs. Macpherson is inclined to give you some all to yourself."

"I suppose I must go and make my apologies," he said, looking somewhat ruefully at my cousin's face. "I wish you would come too," he added.

His eyes met mine. I smiled involuntarily. His manner was so boyish, but he looked a great deal older than Alick Macpherson.

"Do you think we shall get you into favour?" asked Bella. "You know very well you can always get the right side of Mrs. Macpherson if you wish."

"Not always, she is partial to punctuality. However, I won't be in bad company, for I met the Laird as I was coming along, and I'm sure he's on his way also. Only that he was too dignified to run, we'd have arrived together."

"The Laird. Then he is coming!" exclaimed Bella eagerly.

"'Gae tell Mistress Jean to come speedily ben,'" quoted Douglas Hay with a gay laugh.

“ Yes, Miss Bella, I’m almost sure he’s coming here. He was in great feather. More solemn and imposing even than usual. I hope you young ladies will duly appreciate the honour.”

“ You seldom have a good word to say of the Laird, Douglas,” said Bella quietly.

I wondered at her using his Christian name, it savoured of acquaintance and familiarity which neither manner nor words had led me to expect.

The young fellow shrugged his shoulders.

“ Oh, as for that,” he said indifferently, “ he’s no whit kinder to me than I to him.” Then he laughed softly. “ I’m thinking, Miss Bella,” he said, “ that he’ll need a clothes brush when he comes in. He met with a bit accident on the high road—just a stick or something that tripped him up. As I passed he was shaking off the dust to an accompaniment that did *not* sound—quite—like the Psalms of David.”

“ That’s some of your mischief, I suppose,” said Bella, glancing at his demure face.

"What a boy you are still, Douglas—always at pranks. I never saw the like."

"It's—well it's something in the air, I'm thinking," he said, with a sudden gravity. "You're all such good folk here and so solemn and so righteous. It's just terrible. Everything that's fun and sport seems to be looked on as a sin. But you're not to be giving a bad character of me to your cousin," he added suddenly ; "that would not be fair ; Miss Lindsay, you must promise not to believe everything you hear of me, and you're bound to hear a good deal. Inverness is just a fine place for gossip."

"People should not give cause for gossip," said Bella severely.

He laughed.

"Then they'd make it," he said. "I've no patience with narrow - minded, canting hypocrites, who put the worst construction on everything and imagine you're marching straight to perdition if you don't walk in the everyday beaten track laid down by custom."

"Well you never did that," said Bella.

His eyes flashed.

“Nor ever intend to,” he said. “Life is something more to me than a road to a churchyard—at least I’ll pipe and dance as I go along; if others choose to groan, let them.”

“You’ll have to go to the churchyard all the same,” said Bella.

“Oh, no doubt; but this is very melancholy conversation with which to entertain your cousin. Miss Lindsay, is this your first visit to Scotland?”

“Yes,” I said, “and I only arrived last night, so I cannot say much about it.”

“I should like to hear your opinion of a Scotch Sabbath,” he said, with a mischievous glance at Bella. “They have no Sunday here, you know. Why one word is better than another to express the same thing I never could understand. You’ll go to the Presbyterian, I suppose? If you do I declare I’ll be there to watch the effect.”

I glanced at Bella. She was looking really annoyed.

“If you’re a heathen yourself you needn’t

try and set other people against their duties,” she said crossly, “and I’m not sure that we won’t go to the Cathedral next Sunday, so you needn’t be troubling to follow us; I dare-say my cousin would like that service best.”

“No. I want to go to the Presbyterian,” I said.

“Do,” urged Douglas Hay, looking at me with the very demon of mischief laughing out of his blue eyes; “and if old Gillespie is only half as eloquent in his discourse as he was on the last occasion I had the pleasure of hearing him—well, you’ll be hard to please, that’s all. Miss Bella, it’s no use your frowning. Shall I ever forget that peroration with which he wound up a discourse of one hour and a quarter on the text, ‘And the Sun stood still’? Here it is for you, Miss Lindsay—‘And oh, brethren, is not the world full of motion, and is not every living thing a proof of motion, and in the human frame have we not the motion of the arm and the motion of the foot, the motion of the eye and the motion of the lip? and are not the

rolling spheres in motion, and the waves of the sea and the leaves that the wind stirs in its flight? But brethren, take all these motions, and every other that the brain of man can conceive, and tell me is there one grander and more magnificent than the miracle of motion in my text, “And the Sun stood still! ” ” ”

Bella could not help laughing at the tragic face and voice, and I followed her example most heartily. We were now at the entrance, and as we walked into the hall together, still laughing over Douglas Hay’s piece of mimicry, we suddenly faced a gentleman coming out of the dining-room.

He recognised Bella and favoured her with a stiff bow, then, ignoring Douglas Hay’s presence and overlooking mine altogether, he walked in stately fashion into the dining-room, whence proceeded the sound of tea-cups and Mrs. Macpherson’s cheery voice.

Bella pressed my arm.

“There,” she said, “that’s the Laird. Come in and be introduced to him.”

CHAPTER IV.

“ DOUGLAS.”

“ He’s comin’ frae the North,
That’s to fancy me ;
He’s comin’ frae the North,
That’s to fancy me ;
A feather in his bonnet and a ribbon at his knee,
He’s a bonnie Highland laddie, and you be na he.”

“ OH, Douglas, Douglas ! ” cried Mrs. Macpherson reproachfully, as we entered the dining-room, “ when will ye learn to keep time, you graceless callant ! Did I no tell you six o’clock ? ”

“ Indeed, Mrs. Macpherson, I am very sorry. I went for a swim, and the time passed quicker than I thought possible. Please forgive me. It’s mine is the loss, you know.”

“ Well, sit ye down—sit ye down. You shall have a cup o’ tea, though you don’t

deserve it. Ah, Bella, my dear, just come and help me ; and Miss Lindsay, will you sit here ? I'm not sure are ye acquainted wi' Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell this is Miss Athole Lindsay, grand-daughter of Mrs. Lindsay of Craig Bank. She's just frae London, and this is her first visit to her Scotch kins-folk and friends. We must try and make it a pleasant one."

The Laird rose and bowed solemnly to me, but he said nothing. I glanced with some curiosity at his grave face and ruddy hair, and speculated as to what his age might be. Anything from thirty to fifty I should have said.

He seemed a particularly reticent individual —drinking his tea and eating buttered scones in a solemn and sedate manner, as if weighing in his own mind their relative merits and possible consequences.

Meanwhile Douglas Hay rattled on in a jesting, nonsensical fashion peculiarly his own. I think the presence of the solemn Laird prompted him to be more audacious than he

would have been with us alone. He seemed to take a malicious pleasure in saying the most dreadful things, treating neither persons, places, nor things with any sort of respect. And yet what an irresistible manner he had. Who could be angry or offended while those blue eyes flashed defiance and the handsome mouth laughed so gaily under the shade of the brown moustache?

He drew Mrs. Macpherson and myself fairly into the net of his fascination. That mixture of audacity, coolness and fun was to me simply irresistible. I had never met anyone like him, and as the evening wore on and he danced and sang, and played reels for us, and performed conjuring tricks, and in every way proved himself the life and soul of the party besides being out and away the very handsomest of the men present, I could not but acknowledge that I had never met with anyone so delightful---and that the Laird might well frown and look wrathfully at a rival before whom all his own more solid advantages sank into the background.

He taught me the reel, and heartily I enjoyed that merry and inspiriting dance. Then he waltzed as no one there could waltz, and, finding our steps were exactly suited, claimed me again and again on that ground.

Bella looked gravely disapproving, but I was too thoroughly enjoying myself to care about that. I seemed to catch the infection of Douglas Hay's wild spirits. The blood danced in my veins—laugh and jest responded readily to his own. I was but seventeen, and had only known a childhood and youth of repression and loneliness. Something altogether new and strange to myself awoke in me on this night—a sense of power—a capacity for enjoyment—a delight in the new sense of life and youth. I never before and perhaps never—quite—again felt as I felt then. I did not know or question why. I did not even want to analyse the cause of feelings so altogether new and strange, or pause to question the reason of so sudden and subtle a sympathy between two natures that were apparently so dissimilar.

I conjugated the verb "To enjoy" in its every mood and tense that night, and perhaps the strongest and sweetest of the many emotions I underwent was in the moment before parting, when we all stood in the hall, cloaked and hooded, and awaiting attendant cavaliers.

The door of the drawing-room was open and Douglas Hay was seated at the piano. Suddenly he struck a few chords, and then his rich full voice broke out into the pathetic strain of "Auld Robin Gray."

A hush of silence fell on the chattering group. As for me I listened as one entranced to the sweet sad air and the sad and simple words. I felt the tears well up into my eyes. A great longing, and a strange pain and weariness, seemed to fill my heart. It was the story of so many lives. It sounded so mournful to-night from those gay and jesting lips. I wondered how he could sing like that—if the feeling he put into the words was forced and artificial. It seemed impossible that it could be so, there was such a

real ring of tenderness and regret in the beautiful voice. Then the song ceased—the singer rose abruptly and closed the piano.

“Are you all ready? I hope I’ve not been keeping you,” he said.

His eyes fell on me. I forgot the tears that were in my own. In some inexplicable way he seemed to be near me, his hand on mine, his voice at my ear. Only two words that swept by me like the breath of a sigh as he passed on to the open door. “Thank you.”

Then there came the noise and bustle of parting, kisses and handshakes to Mrs. Macpherson, and I found myself with the solemn-faced Laird, who, to my unfeigned amazement, proclaimed his intention of taking me home to Craig Bank after we had parted with my cousins at their own door.

I had grown very quiet, and was feeling somewhat tired before we reached Grannie’s house. My companion spoke but little, and I made no effort to encourage any communi-

cativeness on his part. My mind was full of Douglas Hay—of that look in his eyes which had so suddenly revealed to me a depth of feeling, a possibility of earnestness, a fund of sentiment, with which I had not been inclined to credit him.

Ah! it is only after a long fight on the world's battle-field, after many deep and bitter draughts from the cup of experience, that we learn to read below the surface of human nature, and not to accept men and women as they *seem*. How keen a capacity for suffering those bright natures sometimes veil beneath that sunny brightness. How near the tears lie sometimes to smiling eyes that fain would have us believe tears are unknown. What mask of suffering equals that bitter one of “face-joy,” which sooner or later we all learn to wear, formed, as has been rightly said by the sweetest woman poet that Fame has given us, “of pain long nourished and rounded to despair.”

I found Grannie sitting up for me and eager to hear all about the experiences of the evening.

She came up to my bed-room and helped me to undress, and insisted on brushing out my hair while I talked. I noticed she looked grave when I spoke of Douglas Hay.

“I just wonder at Mrs. Macpherson,” she said. “He’s no a safe sort of lad to have at the house. He’s a bit too fond o’ the lassies and mony’s the tale in the place about him and his wild pranks and fickle heart. Not but that the poor lad has had a hard fight wi’ life. His father’s just a sour, cross-grained, miserly body that never did a kind deed nor spoke a gude word o’ anybody. The mother died when Douglas was but a wee bairn toddling about. He’s had any sort o’ education, but he’s a clever lad and wi’ a wonderful aptitude for all sorts of accomplishments, music and drawing and the like. But he won’t steady down and he won’t work. He’s main anxious to be a soldier, but his father hates the military and won’t hear o’ it. So he’s just

been doing a bit office work here and there. He was at the Court House a while, but his mischievous pranks got him into disgrace. Now I think he's in the wine merchants', McDougall & Co., in the High Street.”

“Perhaps,” I said hesitatingly, “he's got a worse name than he deserves. He is only young and full of life and spirits. He doesn't *look* bad.”

Grannie shook her dear old head. “Oh, my bairn,” she said wistfully, “you're just like all your sex, ready to excuse any man's wickedness so that his looks please you. There's the Laird now. He's just as good and straight and God fearin' a man as ever walked this earth, but he's not popular with maid or matron, though he's a good match and would make just an excellent husband.”

“No doubt,” I said vaguely.

I did not want to discuss the Laird and his virtues. My mind would run on Douglas Hay, and I only saw the picture of him which had imprinted itself so strongly on my memory. The picture of the tall light figure

coming towards me under the ash trees, with the Highland bonnet on the sunny brown hair, and the clear evening light shining in the blue eyes.

“How old is Douglas Hay?” I asked, rising from the chair and twisting up the long thick tresses of hair Grannie had at last released.

“How your mind runs on the lad,” she said, looking at me somewhat anxiously. “About twenty-two or three, I’m thinking; not more. He’ll be leaving Inverness soon,” she went on more cheerfully. “He’s away to Edinburgh the beginning o’ the month.”

“I suppose that won’t make any difference to me,” I said. “I’m not likely to see much of him if he has such a bad character.”

“Don’t speak so vexed like, dearie,” said the old lady gently. “It’s my duty to look after you, and I only warn you against Douglas because there’s no denying he’s very handsome and very fascinating, and he might just take it into his head to flirt with you out

of pure mischief, and because you're a stranger and so different from all the lassies here. It's every new face wi' him for a time, and then a laugh and a good-bye—and all's over. He's a masterful way wi' him too, has Douglas, and no one can be just more agreeable and pleasant when he likes. I'm not for taking the lad's character away, dearie, but he's not just the safest person in the word for a bit lassie to be thinking of!"

“As far as I can learn,” I said, somewhat pettishly, “he has not done anything so very bad, and his faults and sins seem only those of youth and light-heartedness. Because he laughs and talks and dances, and is so gay and amusing, I suppose he is called a flirt. I know all the girls to-night seemed only too delighted when he noticed them or danced with them.”

“I'm sorry he's made you his champion so quickly,” said Grannie, with that strange un-wisdom of age which will warn youth against a scarcely foreseen danger as an inducement to rush into it. “You are a mere child—you

cannot possibly know what men are or what the world is."

"I don't want to know," I said, with a half-smothered yawn, for I was getting tired and sleepy at last. "I only want to be loved and to be happy just for a little while, Grannie; just while I am young and free as I am now. You know," I went on with sudden gravity, born of a memory I had tried to banish, "you know the doctors say I shall not live very long, and so it would not do for me to trouble about things that concern most girls—dresses and sweethearts and amusements. But you are all so kind to me here that I cannot help loving you, Grannie, and I feel as if I could be very, very happy."

"God knows, my bairn, I should like to make you so," she said earnestly, the tears gathering in the kind blue eyes that met my own, "but I'm no going to have you desponding. You're young, and youth is aye a grand thing to build on, and I've no such faith in doctors as to believe they can always know what is to happen. I am sure we'll do you

good here—it's just the air and the place and the life for you. But now, dearie, to bed, to bed. I'm no willing to see pale cheeks and heavy eyes the morn. You'll just say your bit prayer at your auld Grannie's knee as if you were a bairn once more, for ye missed family worship to-night, and then ye'll shut those bonnie brown eyes and sleep well and soundly till I bring your cup o' warm milk at eight o'clock.”

And like a child I knelt at her knee and heard her own petition join with mine and a great peace and content stole over me—a new sense of love and protection, and rest and hope.

That night I slept soundly, but towards morning I dreamt that I was being married to the Laird with great state and ceremony, when suddenly, instead of the wedding march the organ began to play “Old Robin Gray” and ringing loud and clear above its rolling chords I heard the voice of Douglas Hay, and I fell down on the floor of the church in a passion of bitter weeping.

I woke to see the sunlight streaming into my room and hear the kindly greeting of Grannie—woke with beating heart and tear-wet eyes, but strangely, indescribably happy to be able to say to myself, “It was only a dream—only a dream.”

But some dreams are prophetic.



CHAPTER V.

“THE KIRK.”

“ Let us wander by the mill, bonnie lassie, O,
To the cove beside the rill, bonnie lassie, O,
When the glens rebound the call
Of the roaring waters’ fall
Through the mountains’ rocky hall
Bonnie lassie, O ! ”

My journal chronicles the events of each day of that visit to Scotland with the exactness almost of Clarissa Harlowe, but I do not intend to give those extracts here with the minuteness of detail I then delighted in. I never in my life had been so purely, innocently happy, for never in my life before had I experienced what it was to be loved, and thought of, and cared for, as they all loved and cared for me. No wonder that my health improved, that roses bloomed on my white cheeks, and strength returned to my languid frame, and in

a month's time I looked a different being to the pale, thin, sickly girl who had come to Craig Bank.

I had been there three weeks with Grannie before I went to church. The first Sunday I was not well, and she would not let me go. The second it rained heavily and persistently from morning till night. On the third, however, the sun was shining warmly and brilliantly, and at breakfast she announced that it would be as well if I did go to "the Kirk" with her. "No braws, lassie," she said as I ran upstairs to dress. "It's no fitting that one should be in any way remarkable in the house o' the Lord, distracting the mind o' puir weak bodies that are aye moved wi' carnal vanities. You being the young leddie from London, they will be aye looking and wondering about ye, so just put on a quiet gown and bonnet and pay no heed to anybody ye may see."

"Very well, Grannie," I said meekly, and forthwith proceeded to examine my wardrobe and wonder what I had best select.

It was a warm June day—surely no one could call a white dress remarkable or unsuitable. I decided on white, a plain, white muslin, and toned it down with a black lace hat in which were twisted some poppies and cornflowers.

Grannie looked at me doubtfully. I think she objected in her heart to the poppies, but as the bells were ringing there was no time to change the hat. So we sallied forth together, through the quiet streets on our way to the Presbyterian church.

And how quiet the streets of a Scotch town are on a Sunday. It seemed to me as if the hush of Death or sleep lay on the silent houses, with their half-drawn blinds and look of desolation.

Then the whole aspect and demeanour of the people seemed altered. They exchanged grave bows and greetings, but the usual smiling welcome or jest were absent. We met the whole family of Camerons marching in a solemn and imposing procession.

I thought Grannie would have spoken to

or joined them, but she did not, and even Bella's laughing face wore a new expression of gravity that was almost awe inspiring.

I followed Grannie to her pew, and took my place beside her—then, quite unabashed by the preternatural gravity of my surroundings, I proceeded to look about at the congregation.

A little to the right of our seats I caught sight of the wavy brown hair and handsome profile of Douglas Hay. He half turned and our eyes met. I could not help smiling in recognition of the quick flash of interrogation in his eyes, but I was angered too at the sudden flush that rose to my face, and wondered a little why the fact of his presence should have so suddenly altered, for me, all the gloom and dulness of the surroundings.

The service commenced, and its novelty astonished and puzzled me not a little.

It seemed so strange to stand up to pray, and then to hear an extempore prayer delivered to the Almighty with a personal and familiar method of speech and expression that seemed more fitted for ordinary conversation.

It grated terribly on my ideas of reverence, it seemed to me rather presumptuous than otherwise to favour the Lord with a series of personal and parish incidents and difficulties that had occurred during the week. To hear people spoken of by their Christian names as “his servant so and so” or harangued for faults and short comings in a manner that was, to say the least of it, embarrassing.

Then the length of the petition! Heavens! How tired I was and how terribly monotonous was its mode of delivery.

It was with a sense of intense relief that at last I heard it come to a close, and received the information that the congregation would now sing, to the praise and glory of God, the one hundred and twenty-fifth Psalm.

With all the will in the world to be grave and reverent I could not keep my gravity when a being, whom I learnt was called “the Precentor,” rose to his feet and gave forth in a cracked, harsh voice the air of this psalm.

To anyone with musical ears it was simply torture, and alas! when the congregation took

it up just as each felt inclined, in any key, and without the slightest notion of harmony, or part singing, I positively shuddered.

The dissonance was indescribable, and the fervour and force thrown into the so-called singing only made it more horrible.

Then came some reading of the Scriptures, and another long extempore prayer, after which another ear-torturing psalm, sung to the melancholy “Coleshill,” led the way to the sermon.

Oh, that sermon ! For long it lived in my memory. Its involved phrases, its bigoted and perverted rendering of incidents that were surely never meant to be accepted in any literal sense, its perversion of texts to suit some special “point”—its occasional lapse into personality—its apparent familiarity with the person, attributes, and intentions of the Supreme Being, all this jarred upon me to a degree that left my brain irritated, my heart indignant, and any spiritual feelings I might have experienced, in a state of offence and disgust.

I inwardly resolved I would not go to the “Kirk” again, and I was thankful when the service was over and I once more found myself in the open air.

Grannie was speaking to some friends, when Douglas Hay approached me in his “Sunday get-up.” I thought how much handsomer he had looked in his Highland “bonnet” and knickerbockers.

“Have you survived it?” he asked, in a mischievous whisper. “I wish you could have seen the expression of your face! It was a study. Do you intend coming to the afternoon service? You’ve only done half, you know. There’s the ‘interval’ and then we go through it all again.”

“Oh, I couldn’t!” I exclaimed in despair. “Surely Grannie won’t make me?”

I looked round for her, but she was engaged discussing some point of the discourse with another old lady, and had apparently forgotten my presence.

“Listen,” said Douglas Hay, coming close to me and speaking low and hurriedly. “I

will call round at Craig Bank when Mrs. Lindsay has gone to the service and take you for a walk. That will be much better. It is a shame to waste a lovely afternoon like this. I'll show you the Islands. Will you come?"

"Yes—certainly," I said readily. I had no thought of wrong-doing. I did not know even that to go for a walk on a Sunday was counted quite a heinous offence among the good Scotch folk of the town. I only felt the natural reaction of spirits after the penance of the morning. I only thought of the delight of liberty and action and congenial companionship. Then the Camerons came up, and Douglas Hay merely lifted his hat and left us.

"Don't be speerin' after that young man," said Bella, sharply. "He's a ne'er do-weel, and not fit company for you."

I laughed uneasily. "How you all do abuse that poor young Hay," I said. "It's quite a case of 'give a dog a bad name.'"

"And the best thing to do when the dog

deserves it," said Bella. "But how did you like the service? You'd better come home with us, and then we'll go together to the afternoon."

"Oh, no, thank you!" I cried in unfeigned terror. "I really couldn't, Bella. I never sat through such a wearisome and depressing service in my life. I've had quite enough for one day, thank you!"

"Grannie will be shocked at you. It's no proper observance of the Sabbath if you don't go to the two services. The interval is only for rest and lunch, then it's concluded."

"I can't help that," I said obstinately. "I simply can't and won't go through all that again."

"Will you come to the Free Church wi' us to-night instead?" asked Bella. "We often go. You'll like it better than this, and the minister, Mr. Grant, he is a powerful preacher, very different to poor old Gillespie."

I shook my head. "I don't wan't any more church or preaching to-day," I said.

"You're a heathenish, wicked, wee

thing," said Bella, giving my arm a pinch. "And I've a mind not to tell you what Kenneth's been planning for you—a rare fine jaunt I can tell ye, my lady."

"Kenneth!" I echoed in surprise. "Why, what did he trouble himself about me for?"

"Oh, listen to the innocence of the creature," laughed Bella. "When she knows she's just turned the lad's head with her big eyes and her soft smiles, and her dainty Southern ways. Kenneth's aye quiet and serious for his age, but he's got eyes in his head I can tell ye, and for what does he go to Grannie's every evening and teach ye reel steps, and how to pronounce the Scotch songs, and get up at five in the morning to fetch ye rowans from Craig-Phadric, eh, my little lady—just tell me that?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Bella," I said gravely, "I never noticed that he did all these things."

"Poor Kenneth," said Bella, with mocking compassion. "I'm thinking he'd just be

heart-broken if I told him o' that cruel speech. You never noticed, didn't ye? Oh! fie—fie—coz. Well, just open your eyes a bit and try to notice. I'm thinking the poor lad's brain is softening, myself, and his appetite is just pitiable."

I laughed outright. Not for a moment did I believe her, or credit my solemn-faced cousin, Kenneth, with any such feeling as she implied. True he had been at Grannie's very often and taught me Scotch songs, or rather how to pronounce the words of them, but I looked upon him as an elder brother more than anything else. To think of Kenneth Cameron regarding me with anything like sentiment was infinitely amusing. Kenneth, who never met my eyes, whose greeting was always cold and abrupt, who had never even made an attempt at a compliment even in the rough and ready fashion of Alick Macpherson and some of his friends. No wonder I laughed.

All the same, I glanced somewhat curiously at the Cameron group, among

which he stood, almost a head taller than any of them. He was watching Bella and myself, but he did not approach us.

At the same moment Grannie having concluded her discussion turned to see if I was ready to go home.

I said good-bye to Bella and joined the old lady.

I fear I fell rather out of favour with her by refusing to attend the afternoon service. But I was resolute on that point, and she gave way at last.

She went off, and so did old Jean ; and I, with a sense of freedom, mischief, and longing all combined, was left alone in the house to await my expected visitor.

CHAPTER VI.

OFFENDED PREJUDICES.

“ Oh, waly, waly, love is bonnie
A little time when it is new ;
But when it’s auld, it waxes cauld,
And fades awa’ like morning dew.”

I HAD not long to wait.

I was standing at the window when I saw
Douglas Hay approaching.

I ran to the front door and opened it.

“ I am afraid I cannot go out,” I said.
“ Grannie and Jean have gone to church,
and I am taking care of the house.”

“ Oh, botheration !” was the curt and
comprehensive reply. “ Can’t they get in ?”
he added presently, “ you might leave the
door open. No one would think of entering.”

“ I am afraid Grannie would be angry,” I

said doubtfully ; “she did not *say* I was to stay in the house, but she seemed to expect it.”

“Well, may I stay and take care of it with you ?” he asked, “she can’t object to that.”

“I shall be delighted,” I answered, with perfect truth. All the same I was sorry to miss my walk. I looked wistfully out at the blue sky and bright sunshine.

“I know you are longing to go,” he said, smiling. “Shall we risk it? If we are quick we can be back before they are home.”

“But we can’t possibly go to the Islands,” I said ; “they are a long way off I know, for my cousins told me.”

“We need not go there to-day, some other afternoon I will take you if you will let me.”

“Very well,” I agreed, and ran off for my hat, returning in a minute to find Douglas Hay at the piano, softly playing over some of the now familiar Scotch melodies.

“How beautifully you sang ‘Auld Robin Gray’ that night at the Macphersons’,” I said.

“ I have often wished to tell you. I wish you would sing it for me now.”

He regarded me with mock horror. “ What ! sing a profane song on the Sabbath ! Oh ! you little heathen ; why the good folks of the town would be for excommunicating us. Don’t you know you mustn’t even play the piano on Sunday ? ”

“ What nonsense ! ” I exclaimed impatiently. “ I don’t believe that. How can music be wrong ? If it is wrong to play one instrument, it is wrong to play all. If it is wrong to sing one sort of melody, it must be wrong to sing another. They have organs in the churches and they sing—— ”

“ No, I beg your pardon,” he interrupted, “ they *drone*. Surely you learnt that this morning ! The more doleful and out of tune the performance, the more pleasing they consider it.”

“ But that is surely foolish,” I exclaimed. “ Why should we not offer God our best, if we offer anything ? ”

“ Indeed, Miss Lindsay,” he said with

sudden gravity, “ it would puzzle a wiser head than yours to make out the why and wherefore of Scotch ideas on religion. I gave it up in despair long ago. You may sing in the kirk, but it would be a sin to do so in the house. You may walk to the service, but it is a sin to walk in field or lane for sake of exercise.”

“ Then,” I said abruptly, “ why did you ask me to go for a walk with you? Would not Grannie be angry? ”

“ You are not a Presbyterian,” he said coolly, “ and you are only a visitor here, and may surely be allowed some little liberty. You walk on Sundays in England.”

“ Of course,” I said, laughing. “ In what does the sin consist? ”

“ Perhaps,” he said, “ because it is a pleasanter thing to do than to sit in a stuffy church, listening to illogical and bigoted discourses, or have one’s ears tortured by bad singing, or read dry books on sound doctrine and other edifying but dreary subjects.”

“ But why should all pleasant things be wrong ? ” I asked.

“ You had better inquire of the minister,” he said. “ You will be deluged with texts, overwhelmed with prophecies—told you are inclined to worship Bel and The Dragon, and generally scolded, upbraided and declaimed against. I hope it may convince you. I have gone through it all. I am a signal failure, and supposed to have fallen hopelessly away from grace. I assure you that the more dreary and melancholy and depressing they can make the Sabbath in Scotland the more praiseworthy and acceptable do they consider themselves.”

“ But why should they think only their method is right ? ” I persisted. “ I see no harm in the service I have been accustomed to. For the matter of that, I would go to any church and witness any form of worship. Surely it is the spirit that makes it of any value. No religion can be absolutely wrong if its meaning is to worship with reverence or faith the one great Being in whom we believe.

We believe in one God—so we say—how can it matter to Him in what way we express that belief? As far as I can make out in the New Testament, Christ did not establish any set form or any special church. As for Himself, he certainly walked on the Sabbath day and worked too!"

"Bravo!" laughed Douglas Hay. "You've got some sense in that small head of yours, I can see. I must get old Gillespie to tackle you. It would be rare fun. But come," he added, closing the piano, "if we are going for this walk we had better be off, or else we shall find the gude folks all coming back from kirk."

"I wonder if Grannie will be angry with me," I said, still doubtfully. "I really did not know they thought it a sin to go for a walk."

"She has not forbidden it," he said.

"No, but probably she never thought I would do so."

"Oh, come along, and chance consequences," he said lightly, and nothing loth, I

obeyed him. Douglas Hay had a certain masterful way with him that rather swept one off one's feet. I thought it a very pleasant way as we strolled on together in the warm June afternoon, and all the peace and fragrance of the country air seemed strangely still and sweet. We grew very confidential. He told me all about his life at college and his friends there, his escapades and tricks, and the many scrapes he had contrived to get into again and again. I, on my part, favoured him with a good deal of my personal history, in which he seemed more interested than I could have imagined possible. We drifted into discussion on all sorts of subjects. Now and then I was surprised to find how deep a vein of sentiment and sadness underlay that apparent recklessness and mirth.

“I often think,” he said, “that I am destined to play the part of buffoon in life. Everyone has always seemed to expect it of me. I must have a smile and jest for ever on my lips, and be ready to dance, laugh, joke,

and amuse others, however 'down' I feel myself. It is my groove, I suppose ; we all have one."

"I wonder what mine is?" I said musingly."

"I think I could tell you. It is to be sympathetic, and natural, and graceful, to give the eye a sense of pleasure and the mind a sense of trust. That is how you impressed me, at least. Whatever you do seems just the right thing done at the right moment. I could never imagine you being self-conscious, or losing that graceful little air of self-possession. There are people, you know, who always irritate one, and others who always rest one. I should think you could make life very pleasant for anyone you cared for."

I laughed. "You are flattering me and giving me a much better character than I deserve. I am not, as a rule, a favourite with people."

"Because you require to be known," he said quickly. "That I can quite imagine ; but don't you know that certain natures

arrive at an immediate understanding with each other, while others take years and years to get even tolerably intimate. I think now, you and I would be very good friends ”

My face grew warmer as I met the frank blue eyes. I thought of all I had heard against him, of his reputation as a flirt, of the many warnings from Grannie and my cousins.

“ What makes you think so ? ” I asked, looking away from him to where the warm light lay over the dark hills and the fair green country with its lines of hedges and copse.

“ What ? Oh, I can’t exactly explain. I feel it. I felt it the moment I saw you. You are quite different to any girl I have ever met. As a rule, I don’t like girls ; I am much more popular with women—you, I suppose, would consider them quite old women. One can talk to them and not be expected to flirt or make love. I hate this place for that reason. If you are seen walking once or twice down the High Street with a girl, you are immediately chaffed and twitted about it.

My plan is to do that with a different one every day ; it gives them some trouble then to decide which of the many is to be the object of my wavering affections."

"No wonder," I said, "that you are called a flirt."

He laughed. "But I am not one--really I am not. It is very hard to live down a reputation or alter people's opinions. You will hear a great deal that is bad of me ; perhaps I deserve it, I daresay I do, but I hope I have some redeeming points—at least, I should like you to think so. I can be very loyal to anyone I care for, and I never forget a kindness ; as for other things, well God knows I'm a graceless, ill-tempered, suspicious devil ! My education and teaching are to blame for that. I've had a hard bringing-up, Miss Lindsay ; it's bound to tell on one 'soon or late."

His face grew cold and hard. A sudden silence fell between us. We stood beside a little stream that ran through green meadows ; above our heads were the feathery green

boughs of the rowan trees. In the blue sky above Craig-Phadric, a few white clouds were gathering. His eye rested on them for a moment.

“There,” he said suddenly, “is an illustration of the difference between a man and a woman. Her moods and intentions, even her promises, are like those clouds yonder ; now here, now there, now resting, now floating off to new points and new scenes. A man’s heart is like the sky beneath those clouds. You cannot see it always, but it is there, steadfast, sure, patient, enduring for all time.”

“I think a woman is quite as firm, and steadfast, and patient, too, when she loves,” I said quickly.

“Aye, *when*,” he said, with the old mocking smile on his lips. “But that’s not often. She *thinks* she loves ; she says so, and a man believes her. But the drifting clouds are not more fickle than her fancies, the winds of heaven more uncertain than her moods.”

“What can you know about women ?” I exclaimed indignantly, “you are much too

young to have had an experience of any value."

"Am I?" he said, somewhat bitterly, "then you are no student of character, Miss Lindsay. I am far older than my years, and as for experience—well, the less said of that the better. Now I suppose we had best be turning homewards. I don't want to get you into a scrape, so it might be as well for you to be in the house before your grandmother returns."

We began to retrace our steps, but I felt less at ease with him than I had done an hour before, and I began to wonder if my walk this afternoon was not a piece of imprudence, to say the least of it.

"You must not forget your promise to go to the Islands with me," said Douglas Hay presently. "I should like to think I had been the first to take you there."

"Very well," I said, "but would you mind if my cousin Bella came with us? I am afraid Grannie won't let me go alone with you."

"You need not tell her," he said quickly. "I know I'm not a favourite either with her

or your cousins. And," he added, laughing, "though it seems a rude thing to say, I should very much object to the presence of a third person. Two are company, you know."

"Well," I said, laughing also, "I will see what I can do; but I must ask permission."

"You'll never get it then," he said gloomily. "I know that very well."

"One can but try," I said cheerfully. "Good gracious—" I broke off suddenly, "why there is Grannie—and my cousin Kenneth!"

We were so close to them that we involuntarily came to a standstill. Never in all my life shall I forget the amazement, wrath and indignation that spoke out in Grannie's face, nor the cold, haughty greeting with which Kenneth favoured my companion.

Not that Douglas Hay was one whit abashed. I think he rather enjoyed the scene.

"I found your grand-daughter moping in the house alone, Mrs. Lindsay," he said,

“and I persuaded her that a little walk was the best thing for her. You really must not scold her.”

“I’m thinking, Mr. Hay, that as you’re better acquainted with the manners and customs o’ the place than my granddaughter, ye might hae been more circumspect,” said the old lady freezingly. “It’s no usual, Athole, my dear, for people to take walks about the town on the Sabbath. I thought ye would have known that.”

“I didn’t think there was any harm in it, Grannie,” I said, feeling rather abashed by her stern face and Kenneth’s shocked one.

“Perhaps it was my ain fault; I should have warned you,” she answered more kindly. “Well, Mr. Hay, you’ll excuse me saying goodbye, and I hope another time you find a young leddy alone and ignorant of just what’s considered right and proper, in a place to which she is a stranger, you’ll no be takin’ advantage o’ her ignorance. I’m no pleased wi’ ye, and that’s the truth.”

“I’m very sorry, Mrs. Lindsay,” said the young fellow humbly; “but you know I never did hold with the prejudices and customs of the place, and your grand-daughter is equally liberal-minded; for the life of me I never could see why it was wrong to take a walk on Sunday.”

“I’m no wishin’ to argue the matter,” said the old lady with dignity. “You knew my opinions even if Athole did not. I am more than sorry to think ye should hae been sae forgetful.”

She did not offer to shake hands but turned away, and Kenneth, with a stiff bow, followed. Douglas Hay and I looked at each other.

“Please forgive me,” he said timidly; “I hope she won’t scold you. I’m afraid there’s a poor chance for the Islands now.”

A quick glance from the blue eyes—a lingering hand-pressure—then he was gone, and feeling as if all the light and sunshine of the summer day had gone with him, I followed Grannie into the house.

CHAPTER VII.

A RANDOM SPEECH.

“ All you that are in love, and cannot it remove,
I pity the pains you endure ;
For experience makes me know
That your hearts are full of woe—
A woe that no mortal can cure.”

I WAS in disgrace.

Yes, there was no doubt about it. I certainly was in disgrace with Grannie. I could not have believed the kind old lady could have worn so freezing and dignified an aspect as she adopted, and kept up too, for the remainder of that eventful Sunday.

As for Kenneth, he sulked—that is the only word that expresses it. But that did not trouble me in the least ; I thought they were both very foolish to make such a fuss about a trifle.

After all, what could a short walk on a Sunday afternoon matter to anyone? I could not see that it was wrong, and a natural indignation rose in my mind against the follies and shackles of a superstition that could turn an innocent recreation into the semblance of a sin.

The dreary monotony of a Scotch Sabbath had not, as yet, been very strongly impressed upon my mind. When I grew better acquainted with its rigorous exactions and wearisome formalities, I confess I wondered greatly that an enlightened people could so burden their lives and consciences, or find any fitting argument by which to justify themselves for so doing.

I shall never forget old Jean's horror and consternation when I asked her if she really supposed the whole world *had* been created in seven days, and that the seventh, on which the Creator rested from His work, was the identical Sabbath now observed by Christian Churches.

Of course she believed this firmly, and it

was in vain I tried to convince her that the age of the world was far greater than the Book of Genesis allowed, and that Science could prove, by geological investigations and discoveries, the absurdity of a literal acceptance of that much-abused word “Day.”

But my task was hopeless. Every word of Scripture, according to Jean, was a direct inspiration from the Almighty. It was always “His message,” “His ordinance,” “His prophets,” “His judgments.” Anyone at once so narrow-minded, and so absolutely unconvinceable, I never met with.

I was considered a most audacious and godless sinner for my boldness in questioning anything they believed, or pointing out any inaccuracies or discrepancies between various chapters and texts in their perpetually quoted “Scriptures.” I candidly confess that a prolonged residence in Caledonia, dearly as I love it and its people, would have ended in making a rank infidel of me. It was a trial of patience and common sense, and a wilful blinding of mind and vision to the light of later days and

the larger and more cultured views of men of science and learning.

But I now learnt that discussion only led to anger and disapprobation without any better result. I had thought so much on those subjects myself, and had led a life so much beyond my years, that I could not understand why anyone should deem it wrong to take a new or unprejudiced view of religious matters, instead of fettering their minds with the customs and faiths of their ancestors.

If material progress was a natural result of life, why should not spiritual advance march with it. Why should one always accept what was told one, and never seek to look beyond the line that had been long, long before worked out, when superstition was rampant and education limited ?

But when I spoke like this I was looked upon with horror and amazement. I am not at all sure that a good deal of it was not put down to the one fact of that Sunday walk with Douglas Hay. Even Kenneth took me to task for that in his solemn fashion, but I cared

very little for his opinion, and told him so with a frankness that I fear was less polite than candid.

I think Grannie's wrath lasted for two days. Then she began to soften, and I was received back into favour. I found out, however, that some great festivity was on the *tapis*. There were long discussions with Jean and with Bella, and great studying of cookery books, and I heard anxious questions as to how many could possibly be seated at the dining-table. The result of all this was conveyed to me at last by Grannie.

"I've been thinking," she said, "that I must just ask a few folk to dinner. The house is but small, and I cannot well accommodate more than eight at the table. Myself and yourself lassie, make two—then the Laird and your Aunt and Uncle Cameron, five—and Mistress Macpherson, six—and Mr. and Mrs. Gillespie will complete the number. I'll just ask your two cousins and young Macpherson to drop in later in the evening to make it more lively for you."

“Oh, don’t trouble about that, Grannie,” I said laughing, “I shall enjoy studying the people, especially the Laird. He amuses me immensely. Was he ever seen to smile?”

“Now—now, lassie,” said the old lady rebukingly, “I canna’ have ye making fun o’ your elders in that licht fashion. It’s no just respectful.”

I only laughed, and smothered the dear old thing with kisses.

“But he’s so dreadfully grave and—ponderous,” I said.

“And what can a bit bairn o’ seventeen like you know of the cares and responsibilities of a man?” said she, gravely. “He has a large estate and is a very good and wise landlord, I can tell ye. No tenants in all the Highlands are better looked after than those at Corriemoor, and Donald Campbell of Corriemoor is just as good a man, and comes of as good a family, as any in Scotland.”

“Oh, no doubt,” I said indifferently, “but I’m not a bit clannish, Grannie, and I couldn’t be bothered thinking out people’s pedigrees.

What better are they for their ancestors? One likes a man for his own sake—not because he was a Bruce or a Stuart or a Macgregor, or the descendant of some great Clan, who, after all, were nothing better than freebooters originally—whose great deeds of heroism seem to have been chiefly the result of whisky."

"Oh, fie—fie on you, lassie," said Grannie, deeply shocked at my want of patriotic feeling. "And you wi' Scotch blood in your veins—aye, and good blood too, though misfortune has befallen our folk for more than half a century. I'm just shocked at ye, Athole. You ought to be proud o' your descent, and not making a jest and a mock o' it in this feckless fashion."

"Oh, I'm very bad, I know," I said, laughing at the grave old face. "Don't waste time in trying to improve me, Grannie. Let me hear about this grand dinner-party. I feel quite excited. Will you let me do the table for you—with flowers I mean?"

"Well, I'll consider about that," said

Grannie, thoughtfully. "I'm not just sure about ye, Athole. You've many foreign ways; and you're a wee bit flighty at times, for all ye seem so grave and so demure. Ye might just take it into your head to play tricks on me, if I gave ye permission. We're no used to flummuries and innovations here—no Russian and French setting out o' food wi' flowers and fruits spread about honest roast meats and vegetables—just as if they grew together, or were aye intended to be side by side."

"But, Grannie, a table looks so much prettier," I argued. "And half the pleasure in eating comes from pleasant surroundings."

"I'm no sure—I'm no sure," repeated the old lady, doubtfully. "These new-fangled ways don't suit old-fashioned folks like myself, dearie. However, I'm not saying I won't let ye try your hand. It will give ye occupation and keep ye out o' mischief perhaps."

"What mischief do I ever get into, Grannie?" I asked, pouting. "You're giving me a very bad character!"

“Oh ! ye may make pretence of being so good and so solemn, my bit lassie, but your eyes tell another story ; and you’re just turning the heads o’ all the lads in the place.”

“Now—now, Grannie, you know that’s not true. They’re kind and polite because I’m a stranger—that’s all.

She drew me into her kindly arms. “I’m no wishing to make ye an auld wife yet, my bairn. But I should be right glad to have ye make your home in Scotland, and settle down wi’ a good steady loving husband. I know you’re not happy at home, little as ye’ve told me ; and I like to see your eyes bright and the colour come into your wee bit face, and to hear ye laugh and sing about the house as ye do now.”

“I am so happy here,” I said, with a sigh of deep content, as I leant my head against her. “But I don’t want to settle down, Grannie,” I added hurriedly. “I should hate to be married—so please don’t begin match-making for me. Besides—now, don’t look shocked—but really and truly, I don’t think I *could*

marry a Scotchman. They're so uninteresting."

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," remarked a grave voice behind me. I started from Grannie's arms, blushing and confused. Kenneth stood in the door-way—a great bunch of roses in his hand.

"How did you come in?—I never heard ye," said Grannie, rising to welcome him. He was her favourite grandson, and I think he was also warmly attached to her.

"I found the hall-door open," he said, "and so I walked in without knocking. I hope I'm forgiven for overhearing Athole's unflattering speech."

"It is a punishment for eaves-dropping," I said. "What lovely roses, Kenneth, where did you get them?"

"I brought them for you," he said, somewhat brusquely. "And a message from Bella. She wants you to come round at three o'clock and go for a walk. Will you be willing?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "If Grannie doesn't

want me. We are discussing a party," I went on, to hide my confusion. "It is quite exciting. A dinner party, too!"

"Oh, I heard of that, from Bella," he answered, offering me the roses somewhat awkwardly.

I took them with delight. They were lovely. A great fresh fragrant bunch, of every colour, from creamy white to gold and crimson.

"Thank you so much. It was very good of you," I said, wishing he had not overheard that unfortunate speech of mine, or that the rigid formality of his own face and speech would relax in some small degree. But I fear my random words had shot home. He looked very stern and very uncomfortable ; and not all Grannie's attempts to set him at ease seemed to have the least effect.

She told him about her dinner-party, and that I wished to decorate the table foreign-fashion.

"I'm thinking the Laird will wonder at

such an innovation," she said. "But I'm half inclined to let the lassie have her way, for all that."

"Oh! Is this party in the Laird's honour?" I asked. "What has he done to deserve it?"

Then Kenneth looked straight at me—his handsome grave face wearing an expression of sarcasm and ill-temper.

"He escorted you home from the Macphersons'," he said.

I laughed aloud—peal after peal of merriment. I could neither stop nor subdue my mirth, though I saw that neither he nor Grannie could understand its cause. In the midst of it Jean came to the door to consult her mistress about some domestic matters, and the old lady left the room.

I tried to resume my usual demeanour, but I found it very difficult.

Kenneth looked so terribly solemn, and he evidently considered that speech of his such a "facer," that every time I thought of it I trembled on the brink of another fit of laughter.

“I am glad you are so easily amused,” he said at last. “I thought Scotchmen were too *uninteresting* even to afford you a laugh at their expense.”

“I did not think you took offence so easily,” I said—“or could be so sarcastic.”

“I wonder you ever gave yourself the trouble to think of me at all,” he answered huffily. “And, as a rule, I do not easily take offence. I am not aware I have done so now.”

“Well, it is a very good imitation,” I said. “And your speech about the Laird was really too funny. Has he never seen any other young lady home from a party, that you all seem to think his doing so such a very remarkable occurrence?”

“No doubt,” answered Kenneth, stiffly, “he has done so before. But not to my knowledge, and certainly not in Inverness.”

“Oh! Would it have been shouted from the house-tops if he had?” I said carelessly. “What funny people you are—and what a fuss you do make about trifles.”

“We are unfortunate in not pleasing you,” he said, still very stiffly.

“I never said you did not please me. I am getting very fond of Scotland and Scotch people, but that does not prevent my wondering at your little—peculiarities.”

He was silent. His eyes remained fixed on the carpet, and the moody expression of his face slightly cleared.

“I should like,” he said suddenly, and with an effort at geniality which was palpably an effort—“I should like to know what sort of man you do consider—interesting?”

“How that speech rankles in your mind,” I said, laughing, and lifting the bunch of roses to my face to inhale their fragrance. “Well—suppose I said a man who makes one *think* about him—puzzle over what he says and does, whom one never quite understands, and in whose life there seems always one more page to be read. It is when one comes to that last page—when there seems nothing more to know—nothing

more to learn, that a person ceases to interest one. At least that is my idea."

"Thank you," he said, coldly. "You are very candid. I see that I have been making a great mistake about you."

"In what way?" I asked, lifting my eyes to his and wondering a little why they seemed so sad and—pained.

"I have been looking upon you as a child," he said, more gently than he had yet spoken. "A child knowing little of life, and less of men and women. I see I have been mistaken."

"I may not know much of life or people," I said. "But I have thought a great deal about them. I do not expect to find either what I have imagined, or what I would like."

"You are quite right," he said. "Believe me you will not."

Then he took up his hat, and quite abruptly said good-bye and left the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEALOUSY.

“Lofty firs and ashes cool
The lovely banks o’erspread,
And view—deep-bending in the pool
Their shadows’ watery bed !”

“BELLA,” I said, as we were on our way to the Islands by the banks of the Ness. “Is your brother Kenneth very easily offended—touchy, I mean ?”

“Why do you ask ?”

“Because I want to know.”

“Well, I think he’s a bit quick-tempered,” said Bella cautiously. “Perhaps we’ve spoilt him at home. There were such a lot of girls, and mother did make an awful fuss about him. Then he’s so good and steady and has never given any trouble or uneasiness to us.”

“Oh, I’m sure he’s very good,” I said

carelessly. “But I wonder why ‘good’ young men are so heavy and so hard to get on with. Now Kenneth always seems to me to be seeing all sorts of harm and sin in the most innocent actions—to be a perpetual rebuke as it were to everything that is light and gay and amusing. Does he think life such a solemn thing?”

“Not that I’m aware of,” said Bella. “But you’re a frivolous wee body, Athole, and can’t expect him to be just companionable to you. That’s more in Douglas Hay’s line.”

“Ah!” I said with wicked enjoyment of an approaching battle. “Now, he *is* nice, if you like. Nice to look at, nice to talk to, and capital company. I wish,” I added discontentedly, “that Grannie would ask him to her party. She might just as well. But she’s never forgiven him for that Sunday walk.”

“I should think not,” said Bella. “It was the most daring thing I ever heard of. He knew better if you did not.”

"I think you are the most ridiculous people," I said. "And instead of making Sundays pleasant, you just seem to delight in making it the gloomiest and most depressing day in the week. One would think everyone was dead who walked through the streets at any hour after church-time. If God wanted us all to go into mourning on a Sunday, I should think He would have ordered the birds not to sing, the sun not to shine, the breeze not to blow, and all the flowers to close."

"Now, Athole, we won't begin to argufy," said Bella. "I know you're a wicked, self-opinionated little creature, and because you've travelled in foreign countries and seen all sorts of religious ceremonies, and all kinds of heathenish and godless ways of keeping the Sabbath day, you think you're privileged to be dictating to your elders and betters on the matter."

"I'm not dictating, Bella," I said earnestly. "Perhaps if you knew how perplexed and troubled I have felt ever since I began to

think about such matters you'd be more sorry than vexed with me. It is no use pretending. I cannot believe and accept a faith just because I'm *told* it is right. Something within me wants to know more about it — is always calling for proof — proof — proof. In the Catholic churches the service was beautiful, but amidst all the singing and the incense and the organ-playing and the beautiful vestments, one could not help thinking there was so much more of 'man' in the service than of God, and I used to find myself picturing Him looking down on it all and wondering what He thought of it, and if it could really be a matter of importance that on a certain day a certain vestment must be worn, or a certain number of candles lighted, and whether Christ had ever thought it possible that his last, simple, homely meal with his disciples could have been perverted and twisted into a ceremony so widely different as the Mass. And do you know, Bella," I added, growing bolder as I noted the earnestness of her face, "there

is another thing which has puzzled me often and often, and that is about the birth of Christ. I cannot but think Joseph and Mary were really His father and mother—that He was one of those mystical, spiritual-minded beings who from time to time have been born into the world to keep alive some religious fervour and feeling in it. I have read His history and heard it discussed by very wise and clever people—people who have made it the study of their lives—not merely accepted it as it has been told to them. Have you ever noticed that he always spoke of himself as the ‘Son of Man’? It is his disciples who would call him Son of God, and who really fitted him into the Messianic character as events forced it upon them.”

“Where did you learn all this?” asked Bella, looking rather shocked and startled.

“I have read it,” I said curtly. “My father has books that you have not even thought of, and they go far, far back into the history of the world. It is curious and

interesting to trace out how a leading idea or belief will find acceptance and imitation, until it gets rooted in certain minds as truth."

"I think," said Bella. "We had best not discuss such matters. They only lead us astray. What can a lassie like you know of the Scriptures and the history of the Church, when even a minister who has made it the study of his life is often at fault?"

"It seems to me," I said sadly, "that that is just where we all make the mistake. We are afraid to speak—afraid to discuss our doubts—afraid to question the why and wherefore of our faith, and yet on that faith we are pinning our eternal loss or gain. Oh! how I have lain awake in the dark nights and cried and prayed for something—someone—to tell me the truth! How I have thought that I must be naturally very wicked because it seemed so hard to believe, so easy to question—because I could not help seeing discrepancies and inaccuracies where wiser and better people saw none, and the world seemed so lonely and life so cold and hard,

and I could only wonder why I was put there and why I had been made to live without my own will or consciousness, and my head would ache and my eyes burn with crying and self-torture, and I would ask for a sign that religion was true, and for peace or end to my doubts if they were wrong, but there never came any sign, and the doubts—are doubts still."

"Perhaps," said Bella, "God is only trying you. I never imagined you felt or thought so deeply. I must say I cannot follow you, my dear—I have never looked at these matters in the light that you do."

I sighed heavily. We crossed a little bridge now, and stood under drooping shady trees, and the sun shone on the sparkling water, and the quiet blue sky was without a cloud.

I looked at it all in silence. How beautiful, how peaceful the fair earth seemed, and yet how sad and burdened were human hearts.

"It has lasted so long, so long," I said

suddenly, “and it must know so much, and could teach so much, and yet it will tell us nothing.”

“What?” asked Bella, looking at me in wonder.

“The earth,” I said. “The earth that God made, and yet that cannot tell us what He is.”

“Oh hush, my dear—hush,” she cried in a sort of fear, I think at my strange way and words. “Why perplex your head with such matters? It is best not to question. I think we are not meant to know.”

I shook my head.

“Perhaps,” I said, “it is best for us to think so. But why are we given minds, brains, intelligence? are they not meant for use?”

“No doubt,” she said, “but human wisdom is limited. It cannot possibly understand its own origin, or the why and wherefore of its surroundings. I think you had best talk to Mr. Gillespie. He has just a wonderful knowledge of the Scriptures.”

I laughed a little, for the first time since our discussion. I thought of Douglas Hay's description of the sermon on Motion, and my own vivid recollection of his discourse the previous Sunday.

"I do not think he would convince me," I said. "Perhaps my nature is sceptical. I know I have always found it hard to believe a thing just because I am told I *must* believe it."

"I am sorry for you, Athole," said Bella, her bright face looking strangely grave, "it's not a nature that I would envy, and it's bound to bring you trouble and unhappiness."

"Perhaps you are right," I said, "but such as it is I must put up with it, my dear. I accept it as my inheritance from the Unknown Source, and I suppose I shall not make it much better than it will allow me."

"I never thought you were so strange or so thoughtful," said Bella, surveying me with a very grave and puzzled expression.

"I don't often speak of these feelings," I

said, “and never to people unless I know them, or care for them. But they make up a great deal of my life, and since I was so ill and had to think so much of what might soon be my future—the great strange mystery that lay beyond this world and what we call life here—I have given myself up a great deal more to such thoughts than anyone would believe.”

“But you are not going to die, my dearie,” said Bella cheerfully. “You’re just going to get strong and well and bonnie, and lose all these fancies and feelings. You want young life about you, you’ve been moped too much with elderly folk, and uncanny books and the like. But even in this short time we’ve done you good and we will continue to do it, I’m sure of that.”

“Indeed I think you have done me good, a great deal of good,” I said gaily, “but you’ve made me almost in love with life instead of lessening my hold on it.”

“You’re not admiring the Islands at all,” said Bella. “Isn’t it just beautiful here among the ferns and with the glint of the

sunshine on the waters. It's a rare fine spot for lovers, here, and—that looks like a pair of them yonder," she added suddenly.

I glanced in the direction she indicated and saw two figures sitting on a fallen tree some distance off. The cool, grey linen dress of the woman made a pretty spot of colour against the bright green background of the many trees. I could only see the back of the man's head, yet there seemed something familiar to me in its pose and in the soft brown curls under the Highland bonnet.

We drew nearer; they were sitting close to the pathway and talking in low confidential voices.

I felt my face grow suddenly hot. I knew who the man was now, even before he had turned his head at the sound of our approaching footsteps.

Bella's hand squeezed my arm.

"It is Douglas Hay," she exclaimed.

"I know," I said quietly, "but we had better go on. It will look odd if we turn back now. He must have seen us."

We walked calmly by the two figures. Douglas lifted his cap; I did not look at him, but my eyes took in every detail of his companion's appearance and dress. She was not young—not—I thought jealously—even pretty; but yet there was something—something about her that seemed to stamp her with a charm, a grace, and an individuality far exceeding mere youth and mere prettiness.

What was it? The perfect figure in its grey linen gown, the smooth hair of pale dead gold, the large eyes with their white drooping lids. No, not one of these, but a curious subtle charm that pervaded them all, and which even in my brief glance I detected and felt.

“Who is she?” I asked Bella eagerly when we were out of earshot.

“I’m not quite sure,” answered my cousin, “but I fancy she is Mrs. Dunleith, a widow, who has lately come to live at a little place called ‘The Rowans,’ not far from here. I can show it you on our way home. She’s not

much known yet. I think she's not been here above two months, and lives very quietly. Of course," she added, rather spitefully, "Douglas Hay is there at once. I never saw the like o' him. Maid, wife, widow, 'tis all one. He's bound to be dangling after some petticoat."

I was silent. My heart seemed to have grown strangely heavy, and all the golden sunshine of the day looked dull and obscured.

I could not have given any reason for the change, but I was keenly conscious of it, I am afraid—so was Bella. But she was too discreet to say anything, and we walked on, under the green trees and through all the pretty winding ways, in sympathetic silence.

I began to think it would have been better for me if I had not met Douglas Hay—or, having met him, if I had been content to accept other people's opinion of him, instead of forming my own.

CHAPTER IX.

RELIEF.

“ Round the sylvan fairy nooks,
Feathery braikens fringe the rocks ;
'Neath the brae the burnie jouks,
And ilka thing is cheerie O ;
Trees may bud and birds may sing,
Flowers may bloom and verdure spring,
Joy to me they canna' bring,
Unless wi' thee, my dearie O ! ”

WE crossed another bridge and walked slowly on by the bright blue water on our way home.

My visit to the Islands had been spoilt for me, and I was still too young and took everything too seriously to be able to disguise my feelings. Bella had also grown very quiet and subdued, and for some time we were too busied with our own thoughts to exchange a word.

“I am tired,” I said, suddenly, “let us sit down.” The banks were quite deserted. The afternoon was growing late. There was no need to be home till seven o’clock for tea, so Bella made no objection. “So you don’t know Mrs. Dunleith?” I asked abruptly. “She is very pretty, isn’t she?”

“Oh, the folk here think her quite a beauty,” said Bella, “and I believe she is rich too. ‘The Rowans’ is but a small place, but the grounds are lovely; she keeps a carriage, too. You’ve seen her driving several times. I wonder whether she’s come to stay here, or only just for the Meetings.”

“What are the Meetings?” I asked, absentently.

“The Northern Meetings! Why, surely you’ve heard of them. They take place in September. Highland games—bag-pipe playing—all the pipers of the different clans compete. They wind up with a ball. That is the great event of the year here. But you’re sure to go if you stay.”

“I have never been to a ball in my life,”

I said, "I don't think I should care about one."

"Oh yes, you would," said Bella; "you must go to this one, at all events. Flora always does. She will go with Lady Forbes from Blairmore. They generally have a large house party for it."

"And do you think," I persisted, "that Mrs. Dunleith will be there?"

"I shouldn't wonder," she answered. "It all depends on the people she knows, of course. They're very particular. But if her husband was one of the Dunleiths of Morayshire, she's sure to be accepted."

"What funny people you are! Fancy questioning and enquiring all about a person—who they were—and whom they married—and where they came from, before calling or condescending to know them."

"And why not?" said Bella; "it is as well to be particular."

A step close beside us—firm, quick, eager—made me look up, instead of replying. To my surprise I saw Douglas Hay. He doffed

the Scotch cap and greeted us with an evident delight in the meeting.

“I’m so glad I’ve caught you up,” he said, breathlessly. Then he shook hands with Bella and dropped down unceremoniously by my side.

“I thought,” he began, reproachfully, “that your first visit to the Islands was to be with me. You evidently don’t keep your promises, Miss Lindsay.”

“I never made one—to you,” I said, coldly.

I felt angered with myself, because my heart had given so glad a throb, because the colour had flushed so warmly over cheek and brow, because I could not meet his glance calmly and coldly as Bella did, and I perceived he noticed it.

“Well, it was something very like a promise,” he said, “a mutual agreement, let us say, and now it’s broken and of none effect. Hard upon me, Miss Lindsay.”

“Do you know Mrs. Dunleith?” inter-

posed Bella, evidently not approving his confidential tone and manner. “ You soon made her acquaintance.”

“ Or—she mine ? ” he said, with a mischievous glance. “ Isn’t she a pretty woman ? ”

“ Was it *her* first visit to the Islands ? ” I asked, ignoring that question.

“ Oh, no ; you see she lives close by, over there, at that little house shut in from the roadside ; she often walks to them.”

“ Now tell me all about her,” said Bella, eagerly. “ Is she one of the Dunleiths, of Morayshire ? Is she rich—does she mean to stay here ? Have many folk called on her ? ”

“ What a string of questions,” he said, laughing. “ Yes, to them all. Her husband was Robert Dunleith—rather a bad lot, I believe. Went off to Australia—bought a sheep run—made a pile—died judiciously, and left her everything. She came to Scotland for change, has travelled slowly over it, finally rested here, which shows her good

taste—has rented ‘The Rowans’ for a year. Is very anxious to see the Northern Meeting sports, and go to the ball. Now, anything more you would like to know?”

“What people have called upon her?” asked Bella, with a curiosity that surprised me.

“I will get a list of the cards that have been left the very next time I go there,” said Douglas Hay, gravely. “I really have not asked her the exact number of visitors she has received. But she has only been here two months.”

“Well, you seem very thick with her at all events,” said Bella.

“I think,” he said, with evident enjoyment of her discomfiture, “that she prefers men’s society to women’s. She has given one or two charming little dinners. There were no ladies present but herself, and a friend staying with her—a Mrs. Langley White—an English-woman.”

“And who were the men?” asked Bella, eagerly.

He mentioned two or three names. I was not acquainted with any of them. Bella shook her head at each.

“Fast and military; so that is her taste! Well, I don’t think *we* shall call on her.”

“She will be heart-broken if you don’t,” said Douglas Hay, gravely. But I caught the expression in his eye, and knew very well he was only making fun of her. He bent his handsome head to me, and lightly touched my hand. “You see I soon left her when I saw you,” he said softly. “I did feel so cross. I would have given anything to have joined you, there and then. What made you come to-day?”

“Bella asked me,” I answered, glancing at that young lady.

She was apparently absorbed in studying the opposite bank and not paying any attention to us.

“And so you don’t think Mrs. Dunleith pretty?” he said, presently. “She admired you very much.”

I coloured angrily. “I am sure she did

not," I said ; " she may have said so, but it is not likely. I am far too—too insignificant looking."

He looked down at his boots, smiling slightly.

" Fairies—as a rule—are not very massive beings," he said. " But that is no reason why they should not be admired, is it Miss Bella ? "

Bella glanced somewhat vacantly at him. " Who is not admired ? Are you still discussing Mrs. Dunleith ? "

" Dora Dunleith," he said musingly. " That is her name. Isn't it pretty ? So alliterative —wonder why one falls into calling some people by their Christian names directly ? "

" Always a bad sign," snapped Bella. She was evidently out of temper.

" Why is it a bad sign ? " asked Douglas Hay teasingly.

" It shows an inclination to be familiar and —and fast," she answered. " Mrs. Dunleith looks quite capable of being both."

" Yes," he said quietly. " I think she is.

But that does not matter, as you are not going to call upon her."

"Have you seen the Laird lately?" asked Bella, by way of changing the subject.

"No," he said, "not to speak to. We are not very friendly you know."

"Grannie is going to entertain him at dinner next week," I remarked.

"Oh—is she?" He glanced keenly at me. "That is a very wise proceeding," he added presently. "I am sure you will find him most entertaining—after dinner."

"He can be very nice when he likes," said Bella warmly. "And he is a very good, sensible, well-informed man."

"I never denied it," said Douglas Hay gravely. "His merits are patent. He has everything a man ought to have—including wealth. It would be hard indeed to find fault with so well-balanced a character."

I laughed. "Really," I said, "I am getting a little tired of the Laird's praises. I have had them ringing in my ears ever since I came to Inverness."

“ You had better introduce him to Mrs. Dunleith,” said Bella somewhat spitefully, as she rose at last and intimated it was time to return. “ Perhaps they would make a match of it.”

“ Improbabilities do sometimes attain the region of the possible,” he answered, offering me his hand to assist me in rising. “ But in this case, Miss Bella, I feel doubtful. The Laird is too quiet and sedate for Mrs. Dunleith, I’m thinking; and he is at present engaged in singing ‘ My love she’s but a lassie yet! ’ ”

Bella looked at him sharply, an expression of annoyance on her usually good-tempered face. “ What do you mean? ” she said.

“ Oh, nothing,” he said, with well-acted indifference. “ Nothing, I assure you. Only I heard him *chanting* (really that best expresses his views on time and melody) that air as he walked along the banks of the Canal the other night. I don’t often deny myself a whim or fancy,” he added coolly, “ but it was with great difficulty I refrained from pitching

him into the water by way of cooling his ardour, or assisting him to make up his mind about the ‘lassie.’”

“Why do you dislike him so?” asked Bella.

“Why?—Oh, really I can’t tell. Perhaps because he is always quoted as an example of perfection, perhaps because he has always been praised, and I have never met with anything but blame and discouragement—perhaps because he is rich and I—poor. Oh, there are a hundred reasons, for I candidly own I *do* dislike him. But chief of all I think it is because he is so overpoweringly, stolidly, steadily good. If he only had a weakness, a vice that one could get hold of and say, ‘Ah, now you are on a level with your fellow men,’ it would be such a satisfaction!”

I had been silent all this time. Douglas Hay was walking by my side. Now and then I glanced at the handsome profile. Now and then too he would meet my eyes. The sky had grown bright for me again, the day fair. I told myself he could not have cared so very,

very much for Mrs. Dunleith's society, or he would not have left her, would not have hurried to overtake us, would not have seemed so glad to see me again. We had not met since that eventful Sunday when I had got into disgrace for walking with him.

"By the bye, Miss Lindsay, he said, suddenly turning to me. "Was your grandmother very angry about our walk?"

"Yes, very," I said. "She thought I had done something sinful."

"So you had," said Bella. "And I wonder at you, Douglas Hay, tempting the lassie to do such a thing. You knew better if she did not."

"I am rather fond of shocking people's prejudices," he said laughing. "And I don't hold with the views you Kirk folk take of the Sabbath. They are altogether wrong and foolish. Miss Lindsay and I are quite agreed on that point."

"Bella knows that," I said quietly. "We have had many discussions on the matter."

“Still,” said my cousin, “one has to submit to the opinions and habits of other people. I’m not saying that it is wrong to go for a walk on Sunday, but no one here would do it, and it leads to talk, and offends folk, and so it is just better to give in.”

“I daresay you are right there,” said Douglas Hay, “and I will not ask Miss Lindsay to offend again. All the same,” he added, lowering his voice so that only I could hear what he said—“All the same I consider I have been defrauded of my anticipated privilege in taking you to the Islands. What shall I do to make up for it? Have you been up to *Tom-na-Hurich* yet?”

“No,” I said, colouring slightly, as I wondered what Bella would think of this new suggestion.

“Well, let us go there, let me see—Tuesday—Wednesday—Wednesday will suit me. Can you manage it?”

“I don’t know,” I said doubtfully. “Perhaps Grannie may not be willing.”

“You needn’t ask her.”

“Oh, I must. I couldn’t go off walking with you and not tell her about it.”

“Perhaps Miss Bella will help us,” he said audaciously. “She is too kind-hearted to refuse.”

Bella laughed. “You’re a young scapegrace, Douglas, and you know it, and I’m not sure it’s right for my cousin to be with you at all. If she goes I shall have to play chaperon.”

“*Do*,” he said eagerly, “and that will settle the question at once. You can go out together as you did to-day, and I will meet you. There—that’s settled. And now I’m afraid I must leave you. I’m late as it is, and my father won’t be in the best of humours. Good-bye, Miss Lindsay. Wednesday three o’clock. You won’t forget?”

CHAPTER X.

FIRST LOVE.

“Oh, where—tell me where did your Highland laddie dwell ?

He dwelt in bonnie Scotland, where blooms the sweet blue-bell,

And it’s oh ! in my heart I lo’e my laddie well.”

“I DON’T approve of it,” said Bella, “ and I’m not sure I ought to countenance any such proceedings, but I know you’re a wilful bit of perversity, and I suppose if you have made up your mind to go to *Tom-na-Hurich* with Douglas you’ll do it.”

“Certainly, I will,” I made answer.

It was the Wednesday appointed for that excursion to the “Hill of the Fairies” and Bella, true to her word, had come round for me a little before the appointed hour.

The day was lovely. Indeed I had been singularly fortunate in my experience of

weather since I had come to Scotland. Warm, bright, windless ; the sky a pale, soft-blue flecked with drifting clouds, the scent of roses and fresh grass in the air, fair and fertile valleys where the barley and the oats were quickly ripening—the pale glimmer of waters as canal and river came into view. I felt the blood dancing in my veins. I drew in great draughts of that sweet, pure air. I was glad, without questioning any reason for my gladness, and my spirits rose to wild excitement as I walked by Bella's side to the trysting place.

Douglas Hay was there awaiting us, sitting cross-legged on a stile, and smoking a cigar.

I suppose there are times and seasons when the old proverb about “two being company” does not hold good. I know I was perfectly happy only to feel his presence—only to know that pleasant consciousness that I might look, laugh, speak to him when I felt inclined.

Alone I might have been embarrassed, with Bella there I was quite happy and quite natural. The two amused me very much. I

thought Douglas Hay the least Scotch of any of the Scotch folk I had met. His accent was refined, his manners, looks, gestures, all singularly free from the idiosyncrasies I had noticed among the people to whom I had been introduced. I happened to say something of this to him, and considerably roused Bella's wrath by so doing.

“It's just an affectation,” she said—mimicking the Southern tongue and the Southern manners as if his own weren't good enough for him. All the best Highland folk and the heads of the great clans keep as Scotch as Scotch can be. They're proud of their country and their descent, and well they may be. Look at the MacIntosh, and the MacGregor, and the Morays, and the Argyles, they're not ashamed of accent or manner, or anything that marks the Scotchman in their descent.”

“But I'm not of a great clan or a great race,” said Douglas Hay, “and so I have no reason to be proud of an accent or affect one.”

“ Oh ! ” said Bella, “ I know it’s your own ambition to be thought English.”

“ And why not ? They’re very good folk in their way—less characteristic perhaps than ourselves and not so amusing, but I like them and have always liked them. Do you think the two races very different, Miss Lindsay ? ”

“ Yes,” I said frankly, “ why, I should scarcely have believed that a people so near to each other and so closely related could be so different. As a rule the Scotch are very proud of their nationality, are they not ? ”

“ Most certainly they are. Nothing offends a Scotchman more than to be taken for English.”

“ They are far more hospitable, warm hearted and witty, too, than the generality of English people,” I said.

He laughed. “ Is that how they appear to you ? ”

“ She is quite right,” said Bella warmly. “ They are very genuine, and have no affectations.”

“I’m not finding fault with them,” said Douglas. “They are good enough folk, and bad enough too,” he added in a lower tone. “But with all their virtues there is a want of refinement about them. They are stolid—sensible—clever, I grant. But also they are bigoted, self-opinionated, narrow-minded, and money-loving. It is a proverb that a Scotchman succeeds in everything he undertakes—but the main reason is not that he is cleverer, or clearer-headed, but that he is more obstinate, more frugal, and more persevering. Then socially he is less exacting and less extravagant, and comes of a hardier and more matter-of-fact race. There is little sentiment in him, but much shrewdness and no false pride. His religion too is such a personal matter that it is associated with every detail of daily life. He says, ‘Heaven will help you if you help yourself,’ and he *does* help himself—to the best he can get, and with an eye to the main chance. He is always practical and never idle. There lies the great difference between them and the

Irish and the English. There is not nearly so much misery and poverty in the large Scotch towns as in those of the sister countries, though there is just as much vice and wickedness."

"What a pity," I said with a sigh, as I looked round at the beautiful scene, "that there must be wickedness in the world. I wonder God couldn't have made it without."

"You're surely not going to say now that God created sin into the world!" exclaimed Bella in horror.

"She could quote some of your own favourite texts for her argument," said Douglas Hay, laughing at her shocked face. "For instance—'Without Him was not anything made that is made!—and again——"

"We will have no religious discussions, if you please," said Bella with dignity. "I don't know who is worst at that—you or Athole. She drives me just wild with her 'whys' and her 'wherfores.'"

"A Scotch person should never object to religious discussions," said Douglas gravely.

“ That is one of their virtues, perfect acquaintance with the Scriptures. You know very well, Miss Bella, that our folk discuss theological subtleties, or quote and misquote texts and passages from the Bible as familiarly and naturally as other nations talk of a new play, or a new book.”

“ That may be,” said Bella. “ But I’m not fond of doing it. I’ve no desire to have my faith shaken and my mind confused.”

“ A cemetery is a very good place for such a discussion,” said Douglas Hay. “ Here we are at last, Miss Lindsay. You see how the path is cut round and round the side of the hill. What do you think of this as a spot to lay one’s bones to rest ? ”

I looked round with unconcealed interest. I thought I had never seen so picturesque and lovely a place. The winding paths, the lovely green of foliage shadowing the marble and granite, the vivid hues of flowers, the wonderful peace and stillness breathing like a blessing over those who lay in Death’s long sleep below the green turf.

A strange sadness and melancholy crept over me. "It is most beautiful," I said. "How different from most burying-grounds."

"Yes," said Douglas, "I often wonder what made them think of turning it into one. As I told you before, I do not ever credit my countrymen with anything like sentiment, or fine feeling."

"Perhaps," I said, "they feel it, if they do not show it. I have known a great deal of sentiment sometimes underlie a very rough exterior."

We were standing looking at a tomb smothered in roses, and fragrant with heliotrope and verbena.

I pointed to the name and date. "Just my age," I said.

"You must not get melancholy," he said quickly. "I was thinking it was not a very lively place to bring you to."

"Oh," I answered eagerly, "as for that, it does not affect me in the least. I have always had rather a fancy for visiting burial-grounds. But no one could possibly associate

this place with death. It makes one only think of rest and sleep, and the peace we all speak of so often. I wonder if we are ever to know it?"

" You mean," he said very softly, " the peace that passeth all understanding."

" Yes," I said.

" And is it not strange," he went on speaking rapidly, but in the same low key, " that all this day, every step of our walk here, that has been my own feeling—perfect peace, perfect rest, perfect happiness? It was enough just to know that you were beside me, just to feel your dress sweep my feet as the wind blew it from time to time, just to hear your voice—it is such a sweet low voice, Athole—speaking a chance word, or know I need but look down and I should see your soft eyes looking back to mine. You—you are not offended?"

I was listening like one in a dream. We were quite alone there. Bella had strolled on, and was quite out of sight. I heard only the rustling of the leaves overhead, the hum

of a bee among the white roses, the quick beating of my own heart, afraid of its own new gladness.

“No,” I said at last, “I am not—offended. Why should I be?”

His face flushed, the blue eyes looked at me as I had never seen them look.

“I suppose,” he said humbly, “I have no right to say such a thing. No right to tell you that I fell in love with you at first sight, but it is the truth I am afraid. I, who never cared for any girl—or woman either, who only thought of amusing myself—and—now—why, I can’t get you out of my head, morning, noon or night. How pale you look, I—I hope you are not angry. It is not likely that you should have thought of me—that you should care even a little. I—I can’t understand it myself. To fall in love has always seemed to me more or less a misfortune. And now—I have done it.”

It was rather strange love-making. It certainly was not a bit like what I had always pictured and dreamt of, but to me it was as

sweet as any words could be, as true as any truth could make it.

“I should not have said so much, I suppose,” he went on, “but I am rather impetuous I fear, and you—well, I seem to know you so much better than our short acquaintance warrants. I suppose it comes of thinking so much and fancying so much about it. Are you vexed, Athole?”

I shook my head. I could not speak, but I longed to hear him go on speaking.

“You are not vexed? I—I hardly dare ask any more. It seems too much to expect that you should have thought of me as I have done of you, that I should have filled your heart as you filled mine. You gave me back some of my old belief in the purity and innocence of womanhood—a belief I had lost, Athole, in a sharp and bitter experience. I lost all the faiths and sentiments of youth long ago. Perhaps some day I may tell you why. Now—well now I only want you to look at me and say you—you care just a little, for the graceless ne'er-do-well who has been

so abused to you. Won't you look at me, Athole?"

For an instant I stood irresolute, my eyes fixed on the white marble which told that Effie Gray, age seventeen, had "passed into rest."

Passed into rest! Mentally I repeated the words over and over again. How short a life and now—rest. Had she wanted it? Had she sorrowed—suffered—loved in those seventeen years? Had someone wept for her? or did someone come now to weep where the white roses bloomed, and the bees hummed amidst their fragrance?

So ran my thoughts as I stood there in silence by Douglas Hay's side, unable yet to look at those eloquent eyes—to give any answer to his love.

He sighed, and half turned away.

"You will not look—then I have offended you. But won't you even say you forgive me, Athole?"

Then something altogether strange and mastering, and passionate, and sweeter far

than any feeling or emotion I had ever known, swept over me like a wave.

I looked up. I felt the tears throng hot and swift to my eyes, and the tumult in my heart made me faint and giddy.

“ Oh ! my darling ! ” he cried fiercely—eagerly, with triumph and yet fear in face and voice. “ You love me—you love me—say it, Athole, say it ! ”

But I could not say it. I could not speak. His arms were round me, he lifted my face to meet his eager gaze—his lips touched mine

. Oh ! Douglas—Douglas, my only love—the first love of my life, why was not fate kind to us then—why did I not die in your arms, knowing you true—believing all your love was mine ! asking no more—desiring no more ; content—at peace—at rest !

CHAPTER XI.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES.

“ But had I wist before I kissed,
That love had been sae ill to win.
I’d locked my heart in case o’ gold
And pinn’d it wi’ a siller pin ! ”

AFTER that kiss, those hurried words, my whole brain seemed confused and bewildered. It was all so sudden, so wild, so strange. I was scarcely conscious even of how it had come about, of the fetters of iron that this interview might fasten round my life.

His words rang in my ears. The blue sky grew misty and indistinct. I had heard of love and happy lovers, had dreamt and wondered if in my own life one would ever come to woo me from dreams to reality. And now—now it had happened, really happened, and I was utterly bewildered by the suddenness and strangeness of it all.

Douglas's voice roused me at last.

"Had we not better follow your cousin, sweetheart?" he said. "You look as if you would dream here for ever. I wonder if you are happy, as happy as I am?"

"I don't know how happy you are," I said, looking shyly at the handsome face, "but I know for myself I am very, very happy."

"Then why did you look so grave?"

"I was trying to realize what had happened. It seems so strange that you should care for me. I am not pretty, or clever, or—fascinating like your friend Mrs. Dunleith."

A shade crossed his face. "Don't speak of her, pray," he said hastily. "It is just because you are so different to the other women I have known, that I love you. And don't think I am at all a good fellow, Athole. God knows I'm sorry now for my experience, but perhaps, without it, I could not have appreciated you."

I was silent. Those words pained me, although I but half understood their meaning.

Into my love, as yet, no jealous fear or pain had entered. But the day was to come when the shadow of my lover's past was to fall darkly and terribly over my life; when to me, as to all women, that knowledge of the wide, wide difference between the love a man brings to a woman, and a woman gives to a man, would strike sharply home, and destroy at once and for ever my dreaming peace, my innocent faith, my perfect trust.

We walked on together, and presently came in sight of Bella.

“Don't say anything to her,” said Douglas hurriedly. I looked at him in momentary wonder.

“Oh, no, I *could* not,” I said.

It seemed impossible to me that I could speak to anyone of this strange, sweet secret. To share it would have seemed a sort of sacrilege. I was perfectly content to know that Douglas loved me—to dream over his words and looks, and the strange and subtle sweetness of my own new emotions, but I could not have spoken of them even to him.

“I must see you alone again,” he went on, laying a detaining hand on my arm to keep me out of earshot of my cousin. “Where can you meet me? This is such a beastly place for spying and gossip, one has to be careful. Stay, I know a place. I will write and tell you. Promise you will come.”

“Oh, yes,” I said gladly, “I will come, if I can possibly get away. But Grannie generally has a nap in the afternoon, she never minds my going out then”

He pressed my hand, and we walked on to join Bella.

“Have you been studying all the epitaphs?” she asked, as we reached her.

“Yes,” said Douglas, mendaciously, “and I have been telling your cousin stories of the witches and warlocks. But she has no superstition, despite her Scotch blood. By-the-bye,” he said suddenly, “would you like to see a witch—a real witch? I know where one lives, and I’ll take you if you like.”

“Will you really? I should like it above all things.”

“Now, Douglas Hay, I’ll have none of your mischief,” said Bella gravely. “My cousin’s but a wee, weak thing, and we’re all responsible for her. I’ll not have her frightened out of her wits for anybody; and I know where you mean to take her. It’s to that ‘Auld Wife o’ Cawdor,’ as folks call her, who lives in the cave near Craig-Phadric.”

“You’re quite right,” he said coolly. “She’s a great friend of mine, and a very harmless old lady too, though she does a little in the way of prophesying and ‘charm-selling’ occasionally, and is the owner of a black cat. Would you be frightened to see her, Miss Lindsay?”

“Not I,” I said, laughing, “I am not a bit afraid, as I told you before.”

Our eyes met. What I read in his would have banished any fears even had I been of the most timorous disposition; but happily I was not.

Douglas rattled on after this in wild spirits, utterly ignoring Bella’s hints that mirth was unseemly in a burying ground.

“ You’ll be telling me the dead folk know we are here,” he said. “ By-the-bye, Miss Lindsay, I’ll tell you a story of an old Scotch soldier I know. He has seen a lot of rough service, and left many companions in arms on the battle field. He was telling me of a ‘brush’ they had had in India with some sepoys, and that a friend of his, Sandy Mac-Dougall, had his head cut off clean by one of those black fellows. ‘ And I’m wondering often,’ he adds, ‘ whether he found it, for, of course, on the Judgment Day he must appear wi’ it, and I am thinking he’ll just march up as cool as he went to that battle, *carrying it under his arm.*’ ”

“ Certainly, your people have the queerest ideas respecting the Judgment Day I ever heard of,” I said, laughing. “ What on earth should we want with material bodies, with all their necessities and defects, their deformities and weakness ? ”

“ I confess I don’t know,” said Douglas, “ but it’s a rooted belief here that we shall ‘enter into glory’ with them. It’s a good

thing," he added presently, " that funerals are more decorously conducted than they used to be. My father has a story of the burying of a certain Laird, whose coffin did not reach the cemetery for a fortnight after it had started."

" But why ? " I asked curiously.

He laughed. " Oh, too much hospitality," he said. " The relations and friends had to keep their *spirits* up ; I suppose, then it was a case of ' like to like.' They did not get on very far at a time, and had to rest rather frequently by the way-side, but at last the matter was accomplished."

" You need not be telling the child all those things," said Bella rebukingly. " Such customs belong to the past. They never have such scenes now-a-days ; you must go to Ireland for that."

" The Scotch are much more temperate than they used to be, are they not ? " I asked.

" Well," said Douglas, reflectively, " we won't be too sure of that. They *seem* so. But I have my own ideas on the subject.

They're very fond of their native beverage. It may be a sin to do any manner of work on the Sabbath day. I never heard—even in a minister's family—that it was a sin to boil the kettle for toddy!"

We all laughed. We were descending the hill now, and Bella was again in advance. Douglas bent to me. "I suppose," he said hurriedly, "you wonder I can laugh and jest, and all the time my heart so full of you."

"No," I answered gravely, "I am very glad you are so natural. It seems a little strange to believe it all yet."

"It shall not be strange long, sweetheart. Oh! to have you to myself for one hour—one hour. When is it to be? Not really till to-morrow. Could you not stroll out to-night, to those meadows beyond Craig Bank. I would wait for hours on the chance of seeing you."

"Oh, no," I cried, startled by his impetuosity, "indeed I could not leave."

"I wish I had not offended Mrs. Lindsay," he said regretfully, "I am always acting on

impulse and then regretting it. If I could only make some excuse to call. I suppose now Kenneth is always dropping in."

"But he is a relation," I said.

"So am I—in a way. A sixteenth cousin or something. Well, Bella is waiting—won't you try to see me this evening?"

I shook my head. The proposition was tempting, but hazardous.

"I could not manage it, really. You must wait till to-morrow afternoon."

"An eternity," he sighed. "Oh, why can't Bella go on? I must kiss you. I can't let you go from me like this."

I drew back, abashed and colouring. "Please not," I said. Somehow, though I could not explain it to him, I wanted to keep the memory of that first kiss sacred for that day. No other, so it seemed to me, could ever be quite the same.

"You shy little thing. Not that I would have you different, sweetheart. God forbid! Well, good-bye, we must join your cousin, she is looking back for us; say 'Good-

bye, Douglas'—and yet, no, not that; it sounds ominous; I wish the word need never be uttered between us—say ‘till to-morrow, Douglas.’”

And very meekly and obediently I responded, “Till to-morrow, Douglas.”



CHAPTER XII.

DAY DREAMS.

“ O white’s the moon upon the tree,
And black the bushes on the brae,
And red the light in your window-pane.
When will ye come away ?
O see the moon is sailing on
Through fleecy clouds across the skies,
But fairer far the light I know,
The lovelight in your eyes.”

“ You mustn’t be letting yourself think too much of Douglas Hay, little coz,” said Bella, as we went on to Craig Bank, after bidding my lover good-bye.

I felt the colour spring warmly to my face. Would they never give up warning and setting me against him.

“ What makes you say that ? ” I asked.

She looked very wise.

“ I know him and his ways, and you don’t. I have told you before he’s just a fearful flirt,

and I can see he's trying it on with you, just as with everybody else. The wind that blows is not more fickle and uncertain than Douglas Hay."

"My dear Bella," I said, somewhat impatiently, "I wish you would give up speaking about him. You've never a good word to say, and yet to his face you are all that is pleasant and friendly."

"I've known him since he was a lad no higher than that," she said, holding her hand a few spans from the ground; "so it would look odd if I was not civil. But with you it is different."

Yes, I thought to myself, very different. But I did not feel the least inclination to take her into my confidence. It was very hard though to hear Douglas Hay constantly abused and found fault with. How I longed to be able to defend him. How I should have loved to face them all—my hand in his—and say, "He is mine—my love, my lover. You will see he *can* be true at last."

I wonder now that I was not more distrust-

ful—that I did not feel afraid his love for me was but a light and passing fancy—as so many of his loves seemed to have been. But perhaps I was too young then to be distrustful; that is the bitter lesson of later years taught in the school of experience. I felt proud of my love for him and my belief in him. It was all so wonderful—so new—so sudden—but it was very sweet to my heart that night.

I remember when I went to my room I blew out the candle and sat by the open window, looking over the fields where I had walked with him.

The moon was shining brilliantly in the sky; the soft air was full of scents of roses from the garden below. As I sat and looked I saw a figure afar off, leaning against the stile that crossed the footpath. I felt sure it was his figure. The moonlight showed me the now familiar Highland bonnet, set so jauntily on the soft brown curls—the strong slight form, so supple and active and graceful. Even at that distance the thought of his

presence brought the colour to my face. Had he ever troubled himself to watch the light from any other woman's window—had he ever said to them such words as he had said to me to-day?

Instinctively I felt he had not. Flirt, laugh, jest as he might, surely that one look in his eyes was no pretence, but as earnest as his feeling—as fond as my heart.

It was pleasant to sit there, unseen—to watch him as he, unconscious of my observation or presence, kept his own guard over me.

Ah me! How foolish and how useless and how far away seems that time now. I wonder often can I be the same Athole Lindsay who sat dreaming by her casement on that sweet summer night—who watched the gracious glory of the heavens with so glad a soul, so innocent a heart—to whom love came in angel's guise, with never a thought of wrong or shame or suffering to mar its beauty—who was content enough then but to know her lover was near—his

thoughts and dreams with her, as hers with him ?

Ah dear Heaven ! to which our vain prayers rise, surely you must pity and wonder at us ! The faith and hopes of youth that again and yet again are born to disappointment—the sorrows and sufferings of maturity, that again and yet again are realized—the broken idols—the futile hopes—the vain expectances !

The night grew later. The moon veiled herself behind dim soft clouds, and one by one the stars grew faint and faded slowly out of sight. The figure by the stile turned slowly away at last and, followed by my unheard farewell, passed up the pathway and through the dewy shades of copse and hedge-row, and so out of the circle of light, away from my happy, wakeful eyes.

When I woke next morning it was raining heavily. A dreary, dull, persistent rain, that gave no promise of clearing off for many hours to come.

I looked out at the sodden garden—the dripping trees—the wet, misty fields, and shivered as I looked. No prospect of that meeting if this weather continued—no hope of seeing Douglas Hay to-day. I put on a warm serge dress and went down to breakfast, feeling melancholy and depressed.

There was no enchantment in the air now. No glorious world of yesterday! The splendour of sunlight and hope seemed to have vanished together, for in all these long, wet, dreary hours I should be alone. Alone to all intents and purposes, since—even in this brief time—my world was narrowing itself to one presence, and finding out how much that meant.

Grannie noted my depression and quietude, and expressed concern thereat in many fond and sympathetic words. She put it down to fatigue, and was inclined to blame Bella for that walk to *Tom na-Hurich*, which she declared was a great deal too much for me.

I got away from her at last, and shut myself in the little drawing-room to practise my

singing. I knew she would not disturb me there. I fear the practice was very mechanical, and only served as an excuse for my solitary musings. But at least I could dream undisturbed, as I softly struck chance notes, or hummed an air, or ran up a scale.

I played all the songs I had heard Douglas sing. They all had memory and meaning now. I thought of the first evening we had met. How strangely attracted I had felt—how complete had been my enjoyment.

There were many other memories now, besides that first one. Every place where we had walked—the riverside—the meadows, green with the ripening barley crops—the green hedgerows—the stile where we had met and parted yesterday. My heart was full of phantoms, chasing each other with vague and foolish restlessness. I had no calm—no peace now; I wanted him again—wanted to hear his voice—to meet his eyes—to be sure that he loved me—that I had not only dreamt of those sweet words of his.

Keen pangs of fear began to tear my

heart. If he had not *really* meant them—if what Bella said of him was true !

Ah, no—no ! Faith was very strong in me then, and my ignorance and innocence of men and of the world gave me no real foot-hold for suspicions such as later years might bring. But oh—to see him again—to hear the assurance for which my heart craved. I grew impatient. I went to the window. Alas ! the weather was more hopeless than ever. The rain pelted against the panes, the wind blew in fierce and fitful gusts, shaking the rose-petals ruthlessly from their stems, the loosened gravel ran in red streams down the garden paths, great grey masses of cloud shut out the sky and allowed but chance gleams of sunlight.

I shivered at the dreary prospect, and presently Grannie came bustling in—declaring I must be cold, and that old Jean must light a fire. I did not attempt to deny that I was cold—and nothing could have been more welcome on that dreary, tempestuous July day, than the leaping flames that

soon filled the wide old grate, and gave a new appearance of comfort to the stiff and formal room.

I took a volume of Scott's poems from the book-case, and settled myself down by the fire for a quiet read. I had but scant acquaintance with Scotch literature—though I had read largely and widely of English, French and German authors. Kenneth had taken me to task for my ignorance of Scott—so I straightway plunged into "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake," by way of making up for lost time.

The beautiful imagery and bold ring of the words soon arrested my attention, and I became gradually more and more absorbed in the poems. For two hours I read on undisturbed, and in rapt enjoyment of a new world and new scenes. Then a pleasant sense of peace and drowsiness stole over me. I closed the book, and closed my eyes. I forgot the rain and the wild blasts, and the disappointment the weather had brought me. I fell asleep and dreamt of golden meadows,

and flowers—unlike all flowers of earth—of a hand-clasp warm on mine, and a voice for ever whispering in my ear, “I love you, sweetheart—only you—only you.” Of the lucid, lovely green of birch and larch, as the sunlight filtered through their leaves—of woodland plumes, alight in the glow of sunset ; and still I seemed wandering, wandering, with joyful tireless feet to some far-off and beckoning mountain-height, where the rosy clouds lay piled in masses of beauty, and the last sweet glow of daylight seemed to rest. Then the scene changed, and I was in a dark and lonely cave. The water dripped from roof and sides. A strange dull light showed me its depth and extent. My feet seemed slipping on slimy moss and dank moist floor. I felt cold and frightened, and tried in vain to follow my companion. I could see him hurrying far ahead, but I could not keep up with him, or reach him. And then suddenly a dull red glow seemed to leap up in the darkness, and a face looked out at me. A woman’s face—mocking—triumphant

—evil. And, lo ! my lover was beside her ; and, between us, the fire rose and spread—making a barrier I could not pass, and from which I shrank, trembling and affrighted. Redder and redder the red glow gleamed—fiercer and fiercer the flames roared and spread. Imploringly I held out my arms, but he never seemed to heed—for those other arms held him back, and that lovely evil face defied me ; and, far above the roar of the flames, I heard her voice in its triumph and its pride : “ He is mine—mine—mine. No other woman shall come between us while I live ! ” And then, suddenly, and with a cold thrill of fear, numbing vein and sense alike, I saw and recognized the face.

It was that of Dora Dunleith.

* * * *

Cold, and trembling, I awoke, and sprang up from my chair. The vivid horrors of that dream seemed still to hold me. I looked round the warm and cosy room—with the ruddy fire-flames dancing on the old-fashioned furniture—the quaint, spindle-legged chairs

and tables—the worsted work and wax flowers, that were the achievements of Grannie's grandchildren, and of which she was very proud.

How safe and warm and pleasant it all looked. Yet I was trembling in every limb. I could not shake off the superstitious terror of my dream. What had it meant? Was it prophetic?

In a moment my thoughts flew back to the Islands—to the fallen log under the dark shade of the trees and the two figures sitting there. Again I saw the pale glitter of golden hair—the graceful figure in its grey linen dress—the large soft eyes raised, half curiously, to mine, as our brief glances challenged each other. I had never thought of her since that morning. What could have made her face so vivid in my dream—I felt angered with myself for my folly. I tried to think that “The Lady of the Lake” and the memory of Douglas Hay’s “Witch o’ Cawdor” had been the cause of my curious—and certainly terribly real—vision. Still, I

was utterly unnerved, and in vain tried to recover my composure.

The rain was lighter now; there were a few gleams and breaks in the dark grey clouds. I tried to convince myself that those signs were hopeful—that I might still keep the tryst of that afternoon.

As I knelt down by the bright blaze and picked up my fallen volume of Scott, I heard the bell ring.

In another moment there came the sound of the hall-door closing—then a quick, firm step, which already my heart seemed to recognize.

Trembling—doubtful—eager, I sprang to my feet, as the door was flung open, and old Jean ushered in Douglas Hay.

To say I was amazed, is to say very little. His visit seemed at once so bold and so audacious. Scarcely had the door closed on Jean, before I was folded in his arms—my lips covered with eager kisses.

“My darling—I couldn’t keep away. It was no use trying. Hell and furies wouldn’t

have held me back. You haven't been out of my thoughts a single instant since yesterday."

"But what will Grannie think—what will she say to me?" I exclaimed, as, flushing and joyful, and trembling in every limb, I tried to draw myself from those warm and eager arms.

"Oh! bother Grannie! I'll get over her. I'll swear I've brought you a message from the Camerons."

"How could you have come out in such weather!" I continued, looking admiringly at the clustering curls—all damp and bright with rain—that the Scotch bonnet no longer hid.

"Why, I'm not made of sugar, child!" he said, laughing. "And I'm sorry for Scotch blood and Scotch chivalry, if they wouldn't dare a worse thing than weather, for the sake of the lassie of their love."

The answer was so sweet, and the lips that gave it so masterful in their claims, that I could make no response.

How proud I felt of him. How I loved

him in his daring, and his boldness, and his bright eager youth.

Was there ever anyone so handsome, and so loving and so bold? I asked myself. And, having no previous experience to draw upon, was well content to answer: "No."

I sat down in my chair by the fire, and he took one opposite to me. "For propriety, not from choice," he explained.

Then I prepared to entertain him till Grannie should come in, feeling not a little nervous, however, as to the manner in which she would look upon this unexpected visitor.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD STORY.

“Oh, haste, O haste—the night is sweet,
But sweeter far what I would hear.
And I have a secret to tell to you
A whisper in your ear.”

But Grannie did not come in for a long time. She was busy over culinary matters, and, as I learnt afterwards, took Douglas Hay’s visit very coolly.

“I suppose he’s brought some message for the bairn,” she said to Jean, and, satisfied with that conjecture, left us to entertain each other.

Needless to say we did that very successfully.

Douglas was no laggard wooer, and assuredly possessed none of those national virtues of caution and cool-headedness I had always heard lauded. I was supremely happy that morning. Outside, the rain beat remorselessly

on the window-panes, and filmy mists and broken gusts of wind showed that the storm was in no mood to clear. But the little drawing-room was, for the time being, a region of enchantment and seclusion.

We did not speak of the future, the present was enough for us, as yet. And how wonderful that present seemed. How, again and again, we asked each other the still inexplicable riddle — “Why do you care? What could have made you think of me—love me? Anyone else would have been natural, as choice for that divine heart-gift, but not I—not you.” And so on, with all the foolish happy talk and doubt and wonderment that love has ever known and ever taught.

Presently I told him of my dream, to be softly chided that even in a dream I should have learned that sin of Doubt. He was so true, he would always be so true—promises signed and sealed with that “for ever” of love, which means just as much, or as little, as each life may choose.

“Never doubt me, sweetheart. I could not

cease to love you. I could not care for any other woman. I know it—I am sure of it. You fancy, because you have heard so much against me, that I am fickle. Indeed, indeed, I am not. All men are fickle till they find the right woman. Instinct shows her to us. We recognize in a moment what we have been seeking. We are content. We ask no more of any other."

It was sweet to listen to him—sweet to believe the truth of those words—sweet to revel in the wonderment and wherefore of those first steps in love's rosy pathway. Why should we have met, why should we have cared? We agreed it was Fate—or something even kinder and holier. Some angel's blessed power that from our birth had watched over us and guided us to this supreme moment. Our voices grew lower and softer—eyes said more than speech. Heart and soul were filled with a joy almost too deep, too great to bear.

From love's divine world I drew him back to earth again.

“ You promised to take me to this witch, Douglas. Did you mean it ? ”

“ Of course, my darling, if you care to come. We will go to morrow if you like. This rain is too violent to last. . . . You won’t be afraid, Athole ? ”

“ Afraid—with you ! ”

He crossed over to my side and wound his arms about me. I lifted my face to his.

“ Oh, Douglas ! you are *sure* you love me ? ”

“ As sure as that I live, sweetheart.”

“ But—before ? I am not the only one. You have loved other women—kissed them, perhaps, but I—oh, Douglas ! there has been no one—no one in my life till you came to fill it.”

He bent his head on my shoulder.

“ Believe me, you are the first woman who has taught me love. As for the past . . . every man has to live through some experience. His nature and the world force him to do it. But the fancied pleasure is never half so keen, sweetheart, as the regret that follows

after, when he knows what the love of a good woman really means, and wishes that for her sake he had been stronger and better."

I drew myself away from his arms. My heart felt pained and saddened. Already love was teaching me that vague jealousy, that longing to know who and what has "been before" in the life one loves, that all women feel whenever they love.

He saw the cloud and tried to learn its meaning, but I could not have put my thoughts into words.

"If you should change. If I should lose you . . ."

I clung to him in sudden terror. Already in this short time to have let my life go out to another, and that other, one of whom I knew so little. It was strange, it was incomprehensible, but all the same I knew it was only too true.

"Dearest, do not persist in saying that," he entreated. "Surely I know my own heart, my own feelings. When I saw you first, that night at the Macphersons', I knew, Athole, I

The handsome face, the eager eyes, the loving lips, who could resist them? I let myself be convinced, I gave every assurance for which he asked. We were once more happy.

Our interview must have lasted quite half-an-hour before Grannie come in to disturb us. She was quite cordial and gracious to the young man—accepted his excuse of a message from Bella to me with praiseworthy credulity, sat there by the fire with us, as pleasant and cheery as only a sweet and kindly old Scotch lady could be. Then she insisted Douglas must stay for some lunch, and hustled off to see about Jean's preparations in that line.

"It is a shame to deceive her," I said, when we were again alone.

“Shall I tell her everything then, and get a decree of banishment?” laughed Douglas.

I shivered.

“Oh no! but perhaps things might not be so bad as you imagine.”

“My dear child,” he said gloomily, “they would be as bad as bad could be. I have no money—no profession—no matrimonial advantages whatever, and I am looked upon with extreme disfavour among the ‘unco guid’ folk of the town. What could I expect for my audacity in loving you? Not that I care for myself. But ‘tis a shame that your visit should be spoilt, and it certainly would be if this were known.”

I was easily persuaded. It was much pleasanter to be taken in hand and have things decided for one than to have to act for oneself. Besides, who at seventeen regards love as the prosaic portal of matrimony? It is an idyll—a dream—a beautiful vague mystery—one does not wish to analyze it, or discuss it. Only to *know* that it is ours is

enough, the present is far too sweet for the future to affect it.

* * * * *

Douglas must have made himself very fascinating indeed, for Grannie actually asked him to drop in with the other young folk on the evening of the dinner-party, thereby winning my eternal gratitude, and presenting that festive occasion in a new and much more delightful aspect to my eyes. Douglas's presence would make all the difference to me. I could have hugged the dear old lady in the access of gratitude and wonder which that unexpected invitation occasioned.

I think even Douglas was surprised, but needless to say he accepted it with an alacrity and delight which must have been highly gratifying.

After luncheon he took leave of us, despite the weather. We had arranged between ourselves that we would pay that visit to the Witch of Cawdor on the next afternoon. I knew Grannie was going to Nairn to visit an old friend who was very ill. I should be free

to do what I pleased, and could only hope that the weather might favour our plans and behave with more consideration than it had done to-day.

My last thoughts when I fell asleep that night were of that projected visit. I slept soundly, dreamlessly, waking with that soft, vague ecstasy that speaks of peace and happy memories.

Alas ! Alas ! That time does not tarry long with us !

The weather had changed. The sky was clear and bright once more.

Bella came round after breakfast to see me, and we walked round the garden, lamenting the havoc done to the strawberries and currants.

I told her that I was going to the Witch's Cave that afternoon with Douglas, a piece of information she received with great disfavour. But I coaxed her round to her usual good humour at last, and when Grannie departed to the station at mid-day, I believe she was

under the impression that Bella was to take care of me during her absence.

“It is better she should think so,” said my cousin. “Not that I would be denying anything if she asked me. But she’s gone off happy in her mind, the dear old lady, and if I know anything of her and of Mrs. Mactavish, there’ll be such ‘havers’ and clacketing as never was. She’s one of Grannie’s pet cronies. I wonder she didn’t take you with her. Oh! but she’s ill, poor body.”

“Grannie wants me to go to Nairn for the sea bathing,” I said, pulling a half-blown rose from the stem and fastening it in my dark serge gown. “She thinks it will do me a world of good.”

“I daresay she’s right. But you look wonderfully better already.”

“Oh, I feel quite strong and well,” I said gaily.

“It’s just a grand place, this,” said Bella, with complacent pride in her right to sing its praises. “Where would you find the like of the air, and the scenery, and——?”

“The weather ?” I interrupted. “Think of yesterday, Bella.”

“It just makes you appreciate to-day all the more, you saucy bit thing. But look, here comes your gallant. Certainly he is a well-favoured lad is Douglas Hay. I’m not the one to deny it ; but mind, Athole, I’ve not spared my warnings. Take care of your heart.”

I laughed, but the colour sprang rosily warm to my face as the welcome figure approached. He looked a little put out when he saw my companion. Perhaps Bella noticed it. At all events she hastened to assure him that she was not going to accompany us on our expedition.

“It’s a great deal too far for Athole to walk,” she added. “But she’s just as wilful as yourself, so I know there’s no use in speaking.”

“It’s not so far as it looks,” said Douglas cheerily. “And I know a very short cut to the Cave. I found it out accidentally, and I’ll take her that way. We’ve got

plenty of time. It's only two o'clock now."

"Well, take care of the child," Bella said warningly, "or Grannie will be fine and angry with you both. And what's to become of her dinner party if anything happens?" she added laughingly.

"Do you know I've been invited on that evening?" asked Douglas, with an assumption of dignity and importance that almost rivalled Kenneth's manner.

Bella looked astonished.

"No—really? I believe you're joking! Has he been asked, Athole?"

"Indeed, yes," I said. "Grannie invited him herself."

"Oh, then you've been forgiven for your misbehaviour?" she said, regarding him with evident curiosity.

"Will that Sunday walk ever be forgotten?" he answered laughing. "One would think it was a criminal offence. I suppose, Miss Bella, you agree with the minister, who, when a parishioner told him

she had the Lord's own example for walking among the cornfields on the Sabbath Day, said rebukingly, 'I do not deny that, Mary, but let me tell you that I dinna think the more o' Him for doing it!'"

"Now, now," said Bella warningly. "When you begin with your anecdotes, you're nigh as ungodly as papa. He's just stocked with such stories, and that's one of them. I'm not going to listen, so you and Athole had better be off to your Witch, and much good may she do you!"

"Is that a benediction?" asked Douglas. "You don't happen to have a charm of any sort, do you, to give your cousin, so as to prevent her being spirited away on a broom-stick, or some such catastrophe?"

"You're a foolish callant," said Bella, "and only that you've grown so tall and manly I'd like to box your ears as I used to do."

Then she nodded gaily, and went off down the road to the town leaving us together.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WITCH'S CAVERN.

“Loud sobs and laughter under-ran,
And voices unlike the voice of man,
As if the fiends kept holiday
Because these spells were wrought to-day.”

* * * * *

“My sand is run—my thread is spun—
This sign regardeth me.”

THE way might have been long or short. To me it was filled with all the light and perfume of summer, and all the joy and dreams and delight of first love.

Douglas was in wild spirits; he told me legends and tales without end, humorous, mysterious, witty, as the case might be.

“Our old servant at home, Janet Scott, is just full of these stories,” he said at last. “My childhood and boyhood were well dosed with them, and I didn’t dare tell her I didn’t believe them.”

“ Does she know the Witch ? ” I asked.

“ Janet ? oh, yes. She’s great in favour with her, and many’s the bottle of whisky, and bowl of oatmeal, that finds its way to old wife Garvie’s retreat, I’m thinking.”

“ But is she really a witch, or is it just a superstition of the folk about here ? ”

He laughed. “ You had better judge for yourself. If looks mean anything, hers are uncanny enough. She is terribly ugly. However, sweetheart, I’m not going to let her frighten you.”

Impulsively I clung to his arm. How bold and strong and handsome he was. More than ever I wondered what he could have seen in me to care for. A little, dusky-haired, insignificant slip of a girl, neither pretty, nor witty, nor brilliant.

However, I was too happy to do just more than wonder. It was so plain he *did* care, so evident in every look and tone that I met or heard.

So we went on arm in arm, or hand in hand, over rough roads and pathways, climb-

ing stiles, skirting barley fields, drinking in sweet air and golden sunshine, happy as youth and love and freedom could make us.

The way was certainly long, but I was conscious of no fatigue. I had but a vague remembrance of how we went, or by what means we seemed to come suddenly upon the Cave where the redoubtable witch had made her dwelling-place.

The entrance was concealed by bushes. When Douglas Hay pulled them aside, I saw only a dark recess, which seemed to stretch far away into vague depths of darkness. The dripping of water sounded in a monotonous patter in the distance. The coldness and dampness and gloom struck with chilling awe on my nerves and senses. I turned to Douglas in a sudden access of terror and foreboding.

“It is a terrible place. I am sorry I came,” I whispered.

“Shall we go away, then?” he asked.

But a sudden shame for my momentary cowardice made me insist on pursuing the

adventure. Indeed just as I stood hesitating there, a rough, harsh voice from the interior of the Cave, demanded our business, and requested us to come in if we wished.

Still clinging to Douglas's hand, I went forward through the darkness, stumbling over the rough, uneven floor, hearing always that monotonous drip-drip of falling water. At last a dull light came into view—the gleam of a peat fire, by which a solitary figure crouched, stretching lean and withered hands to the blaze as if for warmth.

“Come in, ye whaup, come in,” crooned a harsh voice. “Ye will na think that I dinna ken ye, and the leddy too. Sit ye doon, baith o' ye. It wass a prood day for auld wife Garvie when the Southron leddy cam' to her, and it's muckle she could say aboot the twain o' ye.”

There was a rough, wooden bench near the fire, and to this Douglas led me, while his cheery voice answered back the old woman's greeting.

As my eyes grew accustomed to the dim

light, I looked at her with increased curiosity. A wrinkled, weather-beaten face, gnarled and brown as a tree-stem. Wisps of grey hair straying from a not over clean “mutch” or cap. A garb which seemed composed of any scraps and ends of tattered clothing, man or woman’s, that she had been able to collect—fierce-looking, dark eyes, that gleamed redly in the fire-light—altogether an ill-favoured and repulsive specimen of feminine humanity.

“I’ve brought ye a present, wife,” said Douglas presently, as he produced a flask from an inner pocket of his coat. “Something to keep the cold out of your bones.”

“Ye were aye a gude callant,” muttered the old woman. “And who should ken that better than Meg Garvie, who held ye in her arms your birth-nicht and your puir, young mither nigh giving up the ghaist? But it’s a sair fortune for ye, lad, and an ill day for the lass that may love ye. Ye’ve no’ the face nor the luik that brings gude to maid or wife. Many’s the time I’ve tell’t ye so.”

“Come, come, old wife. None of your ill

omens to-day," laughed Douglas. " You'll be frightening the young lady, and I wanted you to cheer her up, and tell her some good of her future whatever may be your opinion of mine."

The red eyes flashed suddenly and searchingly upon my face. Then the old woman began to rock herself to and fro, every now and then indulging in a sip at the whisky-flask, while she crooned away half to herself, half to us, the following mysterious jargon :—

" Ill fa's the fate when the young and the auld match togither. Ill for the lass is the love o' the lad that woos her sae young and sae trustful, and ill for the lad is the fierce, wild love that he woke wi'out thought, and won wi'out care, and that follows him into the future. Shadows, shadows, shadows, dark and ill and many, they lower o'er twain and three ; and ill-faured and fearsome the fate o' the braw wooer and the lass that he loves. Faith will na' hold and trust will na' stay. Dark fa's the clouds o'er the Bridal Day. Pale is the bride and tearful her ee. Gane is the bridegroom she dreamt there to see . . .

Faith is na fause, but loving and loth, the Laird and the leddy hae plighted their troth."

I looked at Douglas, only half comprehending the muttered words in their queer accent and occasional lapses into Gaelic.

He was writing them down with pencil and paper, and I afterwards made him give me a copy of them.

"What does she mean?" I whispered.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, do not pay any attention," he said hurriedly. "She's not in a good temper to-day."

The old woman, still rocking her withered frame to and fro in the fire-light, looked in a stupefied, bleared way at us both.

"I hear ye, Douglas Hay," she said suddenly. "And ye ken weel that's it's nae truth ye're speaking. Many's the time, ye idle, laughing, graceless callant, that I've prophesied to ye the fate I foresaw. Ye love too often and too easy to love well and truly, and many's the broken heart that ye ken of—and will ken again—"

"Hush, hush, wife, speak fair," interrupted

Douglas. “I’m not so bad as ye pretend to think me. You’ll be frightening the young lady, and indeed, I’m sorry now I brought her, seeing you are not well-disposed to either of us to-day.”

“Ye maun not think that, Douglas Hay. I’ve no forgotten ye, a bit bairn that greeted so sair in my auld airms, and the dead mither in the Kirk-yard. But there’s the black mark i’ your line and your race, lad, and ye’ll no escape, try as ye may. There’s ill bluid betwixt fayther and son, and it will aye stir and burn i’ your veins, and wax hotter and fiercer till wrath and evil shall spring from it, and hame and country shall ken ye nae more.”

“Oh, come away, come away,” I cried in sudden terror of all these horrible prophecies. “Don’t listen to her, Douglas, don’t. Let us go home. Why, oh why, did you ever bring me here?”

The tears were running down my face. Tears of terror and grief, the like of which I had never known. The darkness and gloom

of the Cave seemed closing round me, the air felt stifling and oppressive.

With a sudden effort I tried to draw my lover away from the horrible place, away to where the green, sunny world of wood and sunlight might banish these horrors. But suddenly my strength seemed to fail. My feet refused to stir. Something of the feeling that oppresses one in nightmare seemed to stifle and surround me. I gave a faint cry, a gasp for breath, as the black darkness seemed to close around.

I remember no more.

* * * * *

When I recovered I was lying on the grass, supported by Douglas's arms, my face and hair wet with the water he had brought from the spring near by.

I struggled to my feet, feeling ashamed of my weakness, but the terror of that scene was still upon me, and I looked round afraid I should see that horrible face again, and the evil gleam of the red eyes as they watched me.

“Don't look so frightened,” entreated

Douglas. "She won't molest us here. Oh, darling, I'm so sorry I took you there. I never dreamt she would be in such a diabolical mood."

I clung to him, faint and speechless. It was something more than mortal fear that chilled my heart and froze my blood and left upon me from that hour the dread of impending evil, the certainty that some dreadful fate was in store for me, and that my lover would share in its sorrow.

I did not tell him so. I only clung to him, helpless and sad, listening to his cheering words and trying to believe them, but sure, with an inward certainty that defied explanation, that evil days were in store for us, that the beauty of our love-dream would be only equalled by its brevity.

Slowly and wearily I retraced my steps. How different the way looked now.

I think the impression borne in upon my mind, then and for ever, was the impotence of human will against Fate. Something had come between my lover and myself—warning

—omen—premonition—call it what you will, but I could neither reason against nor overcome it. We should never be happy—we should know no sweet smooth stream of wedded love over which to float our frail bark of happiness, and all his cheering words and loving speeches were of no avail. Heavier and heavier grew my heart as we neared home, and there rang in my ears unceasingly the ill-omened words of the witch. “Ye love too often and too easy to love well, and many’s the broken heart that ye ken of—and will ken again.”

It was the same story again, the story everyone had told me of Douglas Hay, and which I would not let myself believe. Swiftly as my love had sprung to life, yet I knew in my own heart it was a very deep and real thing to me. It meant everything—everything.

A summons had come and my spirit had flung wide its doors to answer it—childhood and girlhood had fled away, and love had been the birth-kiss of womanhood.

But of such feelings I could not speak. They lay too deep—their joy so nearly touched the border line of pain, and the shadow of Love's wings seemed solemn and mysterious as Death as they stretched over my life and folded me in their close embrace.

Perhaps Douglas grew weary of his efforts to rouse me—perhaps he wisely thought it was best to let my mood have its way, for gradually he ceased to speak, and in silence, and now no longer hand in hand, we crossed the hills and meadows to the old stile that had become our trysting place.

The sky was growing overcast and heavy. It was close on sunset, but the clouds in the west were dark and violet-hued, and only a faint line of gold edged their glories.

“I wish I could cheer you, sweetheart,” said Douglas, tenderly. “You look so sad and so wearied. I shall never forgive myself for taking you to that old hag.”

I tried to smile and reassure him, but I know I echoed his wish with all my heart.

Suddenly he started.

“Good Heavens!” he exclaimed. “I quite forgot I’m engaged to dine at ‘The Rowans’ to-night—I’ll never get there by seven surely.”

A little jealous pang shot through my heart. I hated to think of his going there—of the fair woman whose tall, lithe grace had so impressed me. And she would have him all to herself, and I should be alone the whole long evening.

He looked at me. “Why what is it, little one?” he asked in surprise perhaps at my face. I had not yet learnt to mask my feelings.

“I wish—I wish you were not going there,” I said timidly.

“Why—whatever objection can you have to Mrs. Dunleith? You never spoke to her in your life.”

“No,” I said abruptly, “and I don’t wish to do so.”

“Why, sweetheart?” and there was surprise and pain also in his voice as he raised my face and made me meet his eyes.

“Surely you are not jealous—jealous of that woman?”

“Oh, no,” I said mendaciously, “only—only—well I suppose it sounds selfish, Douglas, but I don’t like to think of you laughing, talking, flirting, perhaps, with her, and I so lonely and so miserable here to-night.”

“Oh, dearest,” he cried reproachfully, “you must not think such things of me. They are untrue and unkind, and—and they hurt me, Athole. For God’s sake let me think one woman trusts me and believes in me. Every beat of heart and every thought of mine will be yours and with you, sweetheart. Don’t you *feel* it?”

The words comforted me. I stifled the jealous pain that was so hard and cruel to bear.

But alas—cruel as jealousy is—unreasonable, torturing, vain—what love was ever worth the name that loved without it?

CHAPTER XV.

“MY HEART IS SAIR FOR SOMEBODY.”

“My heart is sair, I daur no tell,
My heart is sair for somebody.
I could wake a winter’s night
For the sake o’ somebody.
Oh, oh—for somebody !
Oh, hey--for somebody !
I could range the world around—
For the sake of somebody.”

WE parted then, and I went home, sadly and wearily enough.

Grannie had not yet returned, so I went up to my own room and threw myself on the bed. I was utterly spent and tired—and yet, tired as I was, how long the time would seem till to-morrow—what weary, weary hours had to be passed before I should see Douglas again.

I was still lying there with closed eyes and in a general condition of misery and depres-

sion, when a knock came at the door and old Jean entered.

“Mr. Kenneth is below, miss, and waiting to see ye. Will ye come down? Lord’s sake, lassie, but how white and weary ye look.”

I sprang up in the bed.

“Yes, I am rather tired, Jean. I had a long walk—but I’ll come down. Tell Mr. Kenneth I’ll be with him in a few minutes.”

I made a dash at the cold water, and then smoothed my hair, and ran down stairs to the drawing-room.

“How do you do? I hope you’re going to stay to tea?” I said gaily, as I shook hands. After all, he was better than no one, better than my own company and my jealous fancies about Douglas and Mrs. Dunleith.

He looked surprised at my unusually cordial greeting.

“Yes, I shall be very pleased to stay—if you wish it?”

I ignored the latter part of his speech, and seated myself on the low, broad window-seat from which I could see the road.

"Grannie has not returned from Nairn yet," I said, "but I suppose she is sure to be back by tea-time. It is nearly seven, isn't it?"

"About five minutes to the hour," he answered, looking at his watch before committing the indiscretion of a guess. "And what have you been doing all the day?" he asked, replacing it in his pocket. "You look rather pale and tired."

"I am tired. I've been for a long walk."

"With Bella?" he asked quickly.

"Do you suppose I'm always with Bella?" I asked evasively. "No, I did not go with her to-day, though she was here."

I had no intention of telling him where I had been, or who had accompanied me, and perhaps he saw that, for he did not pursue the subject.

"I want you to come with us to Drumnadrochit by the steamer one day next week."

"What a name," I said laughing. "Where is it, and what does one do there?"

"You go by the Caledonian Canal—it is a lovely trip. There is a famous ruin—Urqu-

hart Castle—to be seen, and the glen itself—Glen Urquhart—is magnificent. But I hope you will see many of our famous glens and lochs while you are here. The Western Highlands are famous, you know. I went there once with a friend who had a yacht. You can have no idea how weird and wild and lovely the scenery is."

"Tell me about it," I said, glad to see him interested and inclined to be talkative. I always had considered Kenneth so heavy and hard to get on with.

He needed no second invitation, but burst into quite an eloquent description of Loch Fyne, and Loch Linnhe, and Loch Ranza ; of the hills of Bute and the craggy wildness of the Kyles, and the beautiful shores of Cowal and Cantire, and the wonders of Oban and Skye.

Listening to him I felt eager to see all these places for myself and judge of them accordingly. By *myself* I meant of course with Douglas for guide and companion. I fell to wondering if such good fortune would

ever befall me, and in the midst of that wonderment Grannie arrived, tired with the long day's outing and a little dispirited at the condition of her old friend's health.

We all went in to tea, one of those good old-fashioned teas which still linger in my memory, and Kenneth was so cheerful and agreeable that I could not help wondering at the change. He told Grannie of the projected excursion to Glen Urquhart, and she offered no objections to my accompanying them all. I believe the whole Cameron family were to go, and the day was arranged before we left the table.

As Kenneth showed no signs of taking his departure, we again adjourned to the drawing-room for some music. I sang a song or two, and then made Grannie take my place at the piano, and play reels and strathspeys and pibrochs and marches, while I talked to Kenneth.

We had no lights, but sat in the window in the clear brightness of the twilight, watching the stars come out, and the moving shadows of the trees on the white road.

My thoughts flew to my lover, and I scarcely noted what Kenneth was saying. I wondered whether he too was looking out at the soft beauty of the night, and could spare a thought to me, despite the attractions of that low-voiced, fair-haired syren, by whose side perchance he sat.

“Kenneth,” I said suddenly, “do you know Mrs. Dunleith?”

He looked somewhat surprised at so irrelevant a question. I believe he had been telling me some historical facts about Culloden, and the witch’s prophecy to Lochiel.

“No,” he said, after a slight pause. “I have not the pleasure. But I have heard a good deal about her.”

“What have you heard?” I asked, curiously.

“Oh—that she is rich and pretty, and a widow, and very good company.”

“And what else?” I persisted, as he hesitated.

“Rather fonder of gentlemen’s society than of ladies’.”

"I daresay she finds them more amusing."

"No doubt," he said. "No doubt—at least she acts as if she did."

"You talk," I said abruptly, "as if—as if there was something wrong about her. Is there?"

"Not that I am aware of," he answered, looking at me in surprise.

"I mean," I said, "as if she were fast or bold—or not a nice woman. Do you think her pretty?"

"I can't say that I do. But then, I don't admire fair women."

"You have never spoken to her?" I persisted, ignoring any point in that last speech, or the look with which it was accompanied.

"Never," he said, emphatically. "But why do you take such an interest in her?"

"I saw her the other day. She is very pretty—different to most of the women one meets, that is all. And I heard that she was going to stay here for the Northern Meetings."

"Who told you that?" he asked, quickly.

“ Douglas Hay,” I said, colouring.

“ Oh,” he answered, rather huffily. “ No doubt *he* would know all about her.”

“ Why should he not ? ” I asked, coldly. “ That is to say, if she chooses to tell him.”

“ There is no reason whatever — only I should think he would be better able to answer your questions than I am.”

For a moment I was silent. Then I gathered courage and said boldly, “ I cannot ask him, because she is a friend of his. He does not speak against friends.”

“ Then you wish to hear something *against* her,” he said quickly. “ Oh, I daresay I could discover plenty, if it would be any satisfaction to you to know it.”

“ I am not so ill-natured as that,” I answered, listening somewhat sadly to the strains of “ My heart is sair for Somebody,” which Grannie’s dear old fingers were sending forth from the worn and untuneful piano.

“ No ; I don’t think you are,” he said, lowering his voice, “ that is why I wonder at your questions.”

I was silent. That plaintive air seemed to thrill me with its melancholy and its regret—but even as I listened, it seemed that in my heart there was a new pain—a gnawing, vague jealousy, that made it ache as it had never ached before.

Do what I might, my mind would revert to that scene on the Islands. Then I wondered how she looked to-night, in what sort of room they were sitting; whether they were alone. If she looked very pretty? No doubt she did. She was just one of the women who would look well by lamplight and in evening dress—with her fair hair, her white skin, her lissom, graceful figure.

I rose abruptly from my seat and leaned out of the window—the smart of tears was in my eyes, my heart beat furiously and fast. The scent of the roses made me feel faint, and the soft air seemed oppressive. And all the time the sad soft music was sounding on and on, and sadly enough I echoed it, seeing how "sair" my own heart was for "Somebody."

CHAPTER XVI.

“A BRAW WOOER.”

“A weel stockit mailin’ himself o’t the laird,
And marriage off-hand was his proffer ; .
I never loot on that I kenn’d it or cared,
But thocht I might hae a waur offer.”

THE day of the dinner-party at last !

I woke up feeling that something wonderful and exciting was to happen. Jean brought me my milk with a look of importance. There seemed a stir and commotion throughout the house even at that early hour. A racket of pails and buckets—an odour of soap and soda, a general slashing and cleaning, and bustle—that amused me as I listened.

I lay back on my pillow, vaguely and quietly happy. I had seen Douglas every day—I had got over my attack of jealousy—I loved him even more because of it, though not for worlds would I have told him so.

There had been no *tête-à-tête* dinner that evening with Mrs. Dunleith—several other people had been present. I need not have tortured myself with pictures of him looking back at her fair face and dreamy eyes in the moonlight, nor passed a sleepless night wondering if she had made him forget me, or repent his choice.

However, no pain or smart was in my heart now as I leant lazily back there, thinking over all the sweet and foolish things Douglas and I had said to one another—wondering whether he would think I looked pretty to-night in my white silk frock and the scarlet geraniums I had elected to wear with it. It was a pity so many others would be there—all the Camerons and the redoubtable Laird, and Alick Macpherson. However, Douglas would dance with me, speak to me, sing to me ; that was better than nothing.

At this point the noise downstairs seemed so obtrusive that I thought I had best get up and dress, and offer my services in household matters.

I threw open my window to the glorious air and sunshine. How beautiful was the world, and oh ! how happy was I !

I heard Jean's voice in the little yard as I stood there brushing out my hair.

“ 'Deed mem,” she said, “ and I'm no saying the bit lassie has na' made hersel' a general favourite. And she's got a pleasant way wi' her, though she's main troubled aboot things o' the warld. Still I would gie every man and woman the due o' their actions. Though works theirselves are no' saving, still there may be grace behind them. I could wish she were mair fond o' the Kirk, and not so ready wi' her quips and her arguments. It's no just weel for a young creature to be setting herself up in judgment against her elders and superiors, and so I've aye told the lassie.”

“ Oh, the bairn's well enough, Jean,” said Grannie, somewhat impatiently. “ Ye canna put an old head on young shoulders.”

“ I'm nae wanting to do that, mistress,”

retorted the ancient handmaiden. “I’m but just desirous that the head should hae some ballast in it, but young things are aye flighty, and I’m sorry she’s so taken up wi’ that young Douglas Hay. Have ye no’ noticed it yourself, mem ? ”

“No,” exclaimed Grannie quickly. “What makes you say such a thing, Jean ? ”

“Well, he’s aye here, speerin’ after her, and many’s the time they’ve met and walked together in the fields and woods yonder. I’m no saying there’s harm in it, but the lassie’s a bonnie wee thing, and Mr. Douglas is no exactly what one would call—circumspect. A callant that scarce sets foot wi’in the Kirk door, and reads week-day books—not to speak of such ill-deeds as smoking and walking—on the Sabbath Day, weel, he’s no’ the best company in the world for the lassie.”

“No—you’re quite right, Jean, and I’ve cautioned her against him many a time. But I did not know they took walks together. At least Miss Bella is always with them.”

"Deed, Miss Bella is nae *always* with them," Jean said cautiously. "I've been told by the neebors how often they meet. I thought, mem, I would just gie ye a hint o' it. It would be a sair misfortune if the lassie lost her heart to Douglas Hay. He's but a penniless lad, and he comes of a wild and graceless stock—but he's just got that way wi' him that the lasses love, and he's main and well-favoured i' the matter o' looks."

They both went within then, and I heard no more.

I finished my toilet, laughing softly to myself at their gossip and prognostications.

What woman does not love a man the better because he is ill spoken of, or abused, or the hero of misfortunes?

And everyone abused my poor Douglas. I had scarcely ever heard a good word spoken of him; but that made no difference to me. I loved him—that said all.

I ran downstairs to breakfast with spirits

in no way impaired by the unflattering comments I had chanced to overhear. Grannie did not repeat what Jean had told her about my meetings and walks with Douglas Hay. She looked grave and thoughtful, but perhaps she did not consider this a fitting opportunity for lectures or cautions.

Meanwhile I found plenty to do in arranging the little drawing-room, and filling every vase and corner with flowers and grasses.

It looked so pretty when finished that Grannie declared she would hardly have recognised it, and grew more confident as to my capability of arranging the dinner-table.

The hour for dinner was the somewhat primitive one of half-past-six. The Camerons had lent the services of their domestic to assist Jean, and she duly arrived about five, laden with floral contributions from Kenneth.

Grannie, having done everything that she possibly could do, took herself off to her room for a rest and a nap before dressing. I there-

fore arranged the flowers and fruit according to my own fancy, watched by the wondering eyes of Maggie, and the somewhat doubtful and critical glances of Jean.

“Weel, I’ll no say but what it looks pretty eno’,” she said, when my labours were ended ; “but it’s a heathenish fashion for a’ that. I’ve heard of how the godless folk of Rome and other Popish places decked their tables out, and garlanded their heads. I’m no sure it’s fit for Christian folk to do likewise.”

“Oh, Lord’s sake, Jean,” said pretty Maggie, “dinna you fash yoursel’ aboot what folks did so lang syne. You’re ower fond o’ thinking everything evil that’s no exactly the same as it has aye been. There’s innocent recreation eno’ to be found, but some folk will na see it. Ye’re all just for discovering the image o’ Satan when ye look beyond your ain porridge-pot.”

I left them to their discussion and went upstairs to dress, for which important ceremony I had only allowed myself three quarters of an hour.

“I wish one knew how one looked to other people,” I thought discontentedly, as I surveyed myself in the glass. I did not feel pleased. Certainly excitement had lent colour to my face, and the white silk fitted my slight figure to perfection, and the scarlet geraniums gave just the necessary touch of warmth and brightness, but the old feeling of discontent at my entire lack of personal charms was strong upon me as I turned away and went slowly to Grannie’s room for her inspection.

That was flattering enough to have satisfied anybody, but I knew the dear old soul was prejudiced in my favour. Then we went downstairs together to await the arrival of the guests.

They followed close on one another’s heels. First, my uncle and aunt, then the Macphersons, then the Laird, who looked remarkably well in Highland dress. His manner too, was more genial and courteous than usual. He took Grannie in to dinner, but I was seated on his other side, and he talked to me a great deal.

However, as his conversation was entirely about the superiority of everything Scotch over everything any other country could boast of, I did not find it particularly interesting.

He seemed to consider his nationality as a virtue in itself, and I found it less trouble to agree with him than to argue as to the accident of birthright. When the wine began to circulate, he brightened up wonderfully, and I was astonished at the fund of dry humour and the quick-wittedness that lay beneath his seemingly stolid exterior.

The Laird was a very typical Scotchman, tall, stalwart, sinewy of frame, with keen eyes, and a mouth both shrewd and humorous.

He had never left his native land, never crossed the Border, or set foot in England, and he informed me he never wished to do so. Naturally, with such an experience, his insular prejudices were very strong, yet though he was proud of them, he did not fail to see their weak points, and to join in a laugh against himself, provoked by Uncle Jamie's sly hints and humorous anecdotes.

"Why should I trouble to travel in other countries?" he said to me. "There may be finer scenery, better climates, grander towns. I'm not saying there *are*, but I'm quite content with what I've seen here, and I'll take other folks' word for the advantages or the beauties of other places."

"But if you had seen them you would be better able to judge," I ventured to say.

He shook his head. "I'm very well content. Scotland may not be the best place in the world, but it's good enough for me."

He then proceeded to dilate on the charms of scenery, the wonders of mountain and glen, and loch and river.

"It would take a life-time for you to see all that is to be seen here," he said, and for the first time, I met the full, direct gaze of the keen grey eyes fixed on my face. "And I'm thinking," he added slowly, "that I would be well pleased to be the one that will be showing it to you."

I wondered whether the speech was meant for a compliment. I know I laughed merrily

over it, and told him I felt sure I could have no better or more enthusiastic guide—if I ever needed one.

Then, at last, the welcome signal came to leave the table, and Kenneth and Alick Macpherson, and myself, set to work to clear the drawing-room from chairs and tables for the promised dance.

What a merry, happy evening that was!

How we laughed, and jested and sang. How light our hearts and feet, how amused we were when the Laird led Grannie out and the old lady footed a reel as lightly and briskly as any of us.

Douglas and I were not much together, but a look, a smile, a word from time to time, made happiness enough for me.

I felt so proud of him. Never had he seemed so handsome—so winning—so well worth loving as he did that night. As usual, he was the life and soul of the whole party. Who could sing so merrily, dance so lightly, jest so gaily, as my Scotch laddie?

And no pang of jealousy touched my heart,

no fear or dread came nigh me. Alas! had I but known it—that was to be the last night on which I and happiness were to clasp hands for many and many a weary day.

"You look altogether too sweet and bonnie for anything," whispered Bella to me, as she came to my side in a pause of the dancing. "Do you know you've fairly made a conquest of the Laird? Grannie told mother that he had almost proposed for you."

I laughed merrily—but happening to glance across the room, I saw the individual in question watching me with grave and absorbed attention.

"I am glad," I said to Bella, "that it was only 'almost.' I haven't heard stories of Scotch courtship for nothing, and I know how long it takes them to make up their mind."

"Campbell of Corriemoor is no fool," said Bella, "and perhaps he began to make up his mind a longer time back than you imagine."

Just then the individual in question came to claim me for the last reel of the evening.

It astonished me that such a “grave and reverend signor” should perpetrate such folly as dancing, but he performed his national steps and figures with as much zeal as grace.

“ You don’t consider dancing sinful, then ? ” I asked him as the reel ended.

“ I—certainly not ! It is a pleasant and harmless exercise. I’m not in favour of the waltz—nor do I consider it a proper or becoming dance—but no one could find objection to the schottische or the reel—or the quadrille, as we dance it here.”

“ Your national prejudices are very strong,” I said smiling.

“ Have you none yourself, Miss Lindsay ? ” he asked, looking keenly at me from under his thick and strongly-marked brows. “ You are as much Scotch as I am—by descent.”

“ So I believe,” I said. “ But you see, Mr. Campbell, I never lived here as you have done. I came among you as a stranger to strangers. That makes all the difference.”

“ I’m thinking you need not be a stranger

long,” he said gravely and earnestly. “We’d be glad enough to keep you with us, now you *are* here.”

“Do you mean Grannie, or the nation in general?” I said somewhat flippantly. My eyes were wandering after Douglas. He was at the other end of the room talking and laughing gaily with the Camerons.

“Neither,” said the Laird gravely. “I was just thinking of—myself.”

I turned and stared at him in unfeigned amazement. Was he proposing to me, or what?

“I—I really don’t understand you,” I answered coldly.

“We’ve not been very long acquainted,” he explained. “But I cannot help saying I’ve a great admiration for you, Miss Lindsay, and a great liking too. I know you’re but a young thing—but I know too that you’ve not just been what one would call happy. I’m sure I could make you so. I would like ye for my wife, and that’s just the truth. Will you think it over?”

His accent and his expressions had grown very Scotch in his earnestness. I listened to him with more amusement than sympathy. I wondered what Douglas would think if he knew I was receiving a proposal of marriage under his very eyes.

“I am much obliged to you for the honour you have done me,” I said, “but really, Mr. Campbell, I could not dream of accepting your offer. Indeed, I have never thought of you at all.”

He looked somewhat hurt at my frankness.

“I hope I have not offended you,” he said. “I fear I have spoken too soon. But will you not consider over the matter, and give me an answer? I will bide your own time. You need not hurry.”

I looked at him in amazement, unqualified by any other expression. It was the one feeling in my heart.

That this middle-aged, sensible, unromantic individual could really have fallen in love with me—be seriously desirous of making me his wife, seemed almost incredible.

"Will you?" he said gently and persistently, as I remained silent.

"Will I—will I what?" I asked, rousing myself with a start from my abstraction.

"Have you no' been listening?" he said in a somewhat vexed tone.

"Oh, yes, I—I beg your pardon," I answered hurriedly.

At the same moment, Douglas went over to the piano and struck up "There came a braw wooer." I could scarcely help smiling, but as I looked up at the face of my companion something in its pallor and earnestness moved me to graver thoughts.

"Does that 'yes' mean you will be considering the subject," he said under cover of Douglas's rich ringing notes.

"I am afraid it would be no use," I said hurriedly, and rather vexed at the observation our prolonged *tête-à-tête* was drawing down upon me.

"Am I so very objectionable?" he asked gently. "Old, perhaps, by comparison with yourself, but all the better able to care for

and protect you. I'm no' speaking hastily, or without thought, Miss Lindsay. I never cared for lass or woman yet--but I just felt my whole heart go out to ye that first night I saw ye at Mrs. Macpherson's, and I know well that I shall never care for any other lassie, now."

"I am so sorry," I said stupidly. "I really never thought, never dreamt of such a thing. But it could never be, Mr. Campbell. Don't think I'm speaking hastily or with prejudice—I like you very much as a friend, but that is all."

"In a year," he urged. "Or even two, if ye would but just gie' yourself time to think it over."

I shook my head resolutely. "No, indeed, I am sure—quite sure."

He half turned away. A sort of hysterical nervousness seized me. "The braw wooer." was still careering merrily through the phases of his courtship. It seemed all so ludicrous, so odd. I thought of Bella's jests—of our nickname—of a hundred and one things as I glanced at the broad shoulders in all their

bravery of tartan plaid and flying ribbons. And he wanted me to take a year or two to *think* over his proposal! Oh! unexampled patience of the Celt!

“I suppose,” he said at last, once more turning his grey eyes and grave face to mine, “I must e’en rest content. But I would like you to remember I mean this most sincerely. I shall mean it always—and if you should think better of it, Miss Lindsay, I need scarcely say you would make me very, very happy.”

There was something so earnest, so deep-feeling in his voice, that it touched me more than anything he had yet said.

“As long as you are free,” he went on, “I shall not despair. We are a patient race, you know, and I can be very patient, for to me love and friendship are no boy’s fancies.”

Then he moved away from my side, and, with scarlet cheeks and an uncomfortable sensation as of a lump in my throat, I crossed the room to the piano.

“‘He begged for gudesake I wad be his wife,
Or else I wad kill him wi’ sorrow.’”

sang Douglas. He looked up at me; our eyes met. Then he ended abruptly and with no mirth or meaning so it seemed to me:

“‘I think I maun wed him to-morrow—to-morrow,
I think I maun wed him to-morrow !’

“Are you going to wed the Laird, Athole ?” he asked abruptly, under cover of the closing chords. “I’m sure he’s fallen in love with you, and it would be a good thing for you—I was thinking how selfish and inconsiderate I have been.”

“Oh, Douglas,” I cried quickly—passionately. “Do you regret—are you tired—sorry already ?”

He heard the break in my voice—he saw the quick tears spring to my eyes. And yet—and yet—he turned away, coldly, silently, leaving me standing there gazing in blank and pained bewilderment at the open page on the music rest.

“And I maun wed him to-morrow—to-morrow,
And I maun wed him to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XVII.

DISTRUST.

“‘Oh, rise, my child,’ her mother said,
‘Nor sorrow thus in vain.
A perfidious lover’s fleeting heart
No tears recall again.’

“‘Oh, mother what is gone is gone,
What’s lost—for ever lorn.
Death—death alone can comfort me.
Would I had ne’er been born !’”

I TOOK a heavy heart upstairs with me to my room that night.

In some way — by some means — I had offended Douglas, and he had left me coldly, formally, just as if I had been a stranger. I tried to remember any cause for offence, but my conscience did not reproach me on any point. I could not help the Laird’s attentions—I could not have prevented his proposal, and yet Douglas was angry with me. Coldly, silently angry—the sort of

anger I detested. I never minded anyone getting into a good passionate rage and storming at me to their heart's content, but the sort of anger my lover had displayed, which offered no scope for explanation, and sheltered itself behind chilling ironies and huffy speeches—that I could not bear with equanimity.

I tore off the pretty white silk, and threw the scarlet flowers, now drooping and dead, on the floor. Of what use had been the wearing of grand apparel, the “tiring of my hair,” the flush of cheek, and sparkle of eye, which—for once—had made me look so well, and so happy?

Douglas had not cared—Douglas had left me coldly and sternly; had said I was a flirt who encouraged admiration, had not even *hinted* at a meeting or appointment for the next day, had not offered any opportunity that we might “make it up again.”

I threw myself down on the bed and cried bitterly and passionately. The day had begun so well, it had been so happy—and

now—now, how miserably it was ending. My fit of weeping exhausted me and made my head ache. Then I, in turn, became angered and offended.

If Douglas could so quickly distrust me, so easily grew cold, he could not love me so very, very much. My thoughts grew bitter, and brought up in array against him all the stories in his prejudice that I had heard so often. Perhaps he was getting tired of me already, perhaps he had been contrasting me with Mrs. Dunleith, or some new acquaintance.

In incoherent misery I ran over suggestions —hints — incidents — suspicions. After all, had not everyone warned me against him, declared him to be fickle and untrustworthy? Why should I set up my judgment as being more correct, my brief experience as more trustworthy? Just as I reached this point, the door suddenly opened and Grannie entered.

I sprang up in the bed, conscious of flushed cheeks and disordered hair, and tear-wet eyes.

The old lady came up to me with some eagerness.

“I could not go to rest, my dearie,” she said, “without just a word of congratulation to you. A rare and fine piece o’ luck it is, my bairn—he, so good, and so wise, and so kind, and wi’ such a grand place and position. Campbell o’ Corriemoor is a match to be proud of I can tell ye. And he’s just daft about ye; the way he spoke, flushing and halting for all the world like a school-boy wi’ his first sweetheart, and he always so cool and so circumspect. But of course he told you yoursel’ eh, dearie, and . . . Why, my bairn, for what are ye greeting ? ”

I smoothed back my disordered hair and tried to compose myself. “Oh, Grannie,” I cried miserably, “I’m so unhappy.”

“And for why, dearie? You ought to be just the most thankful lassie in all Scotland the night, wi’ your gran’ prospects and braw wooer.”

Her kind arms were round me, my head rested on her dear old shoulder. I wished

she had not been so confident that I had accepted my “braw wooer.” I wondered if she would be very angry if I told her I had refused his suit, and scorned his manifold advantages.

“Grannie,” I said wearily, “you mustn’t be cross, but I’m not going to marry the Laird. I couldn’t. I don’t care for him one bit. I never was so astonished in my life as when he spoke to me to-night.”

Her arms relaxed their clasp of me. She simply stood there beside the bed—astonishment and indignation on every line of her face.

“You’re no goin’ to marry him—you’ve refused Campbell o’ Corriemoor? Lord forgie ye, bairn—are ye daft?”

“Perhaps,” I said despondingly. “I’m sure he’s very good and kind and all that—but what does that matter Grannie, when I don’t care for him? It would surely be a sin to marry a man only because he was rich and had a fine position to offer you, and all the time your heart was quite cold and in-

different. And that's just how I feel about the Laird."

But Grannie's face looked very stern and severe.

"It's just flying in the face o' Providence," she said wrathfully. "I never heard o' such wilfulness. Why cannot ye love him? He's good-looking and good-hearted, he's true and fond of you. There's never a voice can be raised against him of man or woman to say harm or evil that he's done. Ye've not so happy a home, lassie, that ye should be so quick in refusing anither, and the day will come when ye'll surely repent o' it."

I sighed wearily. "All that may be quite true, Grannie, but I cannot marry the Laird."

"Ye're sure of that?" she asked quickly. "Is there any other reason? Are ye foolish eno' to be thinking and hankering after yon graceless callant, Douglas Hay? I've heard you've been much together. But surely, lassie, ye'll no be quite sic' a fool as to listen to him! The wind that blows is not more fickle, the burn that babbles i' the meadow

yonder not more shallow, or useless, or idle a thing. He *wad* make love to any one just for sheer mischief or amusement, but he *canna'* marry, and he kens that weel, and for all his good looks and winning ways, I'm sorry for the lass who gives her heart to his keeping."

I was silent. What use to vindicate him? What use to tell her that I *had* committed the folly against which I had been warned so unceasingly? She would only be angry and indignant. She would only rank it as a piece of youthful folly, she would only repeat, with the wisdom and foresight of age—that foresight against which youth so passionately rebels—"Of what use to love, of what use to think of him?—he cannot marry you." Just as if the prose of matrimony ever entered into the consideration of seventeen—as if it did not seem rather a drawback than an incentive to love, seeing how few married folk were lovers, and how one and all raged against the imprudence of such proceedings on the part of their respective sons and daughters.

She noted my silence and my troubled face.

“ Well, well,” she said more gently, “ I mustn’t be too hard on ye, lassie. Ye’re ower young to have much sense. But I hope you’ll think over this matter, for the Laird’s no just the person to be easily daunted, and the ‘No’ of a lassie has been changed to ‘Yes’ before now.”

She kissed me in the old affectionate way. “ You look very weary, my bairn,” she said. “ Go to sleep now and never fash yoursel’ about lovers and husbands any more the nicht. Ye’ll get wiser as ye grow older, and be more ready to believe in your old Grannie’s advice. It’s aye for your ain gude she means it.”

Then she left me, and very slowly and wearily I went through the task of undressing, and laid my head on the pillow at last.

I did not sleep well, my dreams were feverish and disturbed, and among them there figured constantly the uncanny face and words of the Witch of Cawdor. I woke with a severe headache, which obliged me to spend

the whole morning lying down on the couch in the little drawing-room. I could not read, the pain was too severe. I could only just lie there with the room darkened to keep out the sun, and my own miserable thoughts for company.

Grannie was kindness itself, and so was Jean, but the day was a very long and weary one for me. No message came from Douglas Hay, and I could only conclude that he was still offended.

In the evening Kenneth and Bella came in to discuss the day for our jaunt to Glen Urquhart. Bella exclaimed at my white face and heavy eyes, but her cheery presence did me good and roused me a little from the apathy and general depression of mind and body to which I had resigned myself throughout the day. Shortly before they left, Kenneth and Grannie went into the dining-room for some refreshment, and Bella and I were left alone.

She turned to me with a sort of suppressed eagerness.

“Tell me, Athole,” she said hurriedly, “did the Laird propose to you last night?”

“What makes you think he would do anything so foolish?” I asked evasively.

“Well, his manner, and the mysterious hints Grannie was giving us. He spoke to her about you I know. What a fine thing it would be for you, my dear---Mrs. Campbell of Corriemoor!”

“You had better say Queen of England at once,” I said ill-temperedly, “one is as probable as the other.”

“But he is fond of you, anyone could see that,” she answered, “and for such a quiet, cold sort of man as he has always shewn himself, it was just wonderful to see him last night. Not but what ye looked the bonniest wee thing anyone could wish to see,” she added extenuatingly.

“I laughed scornfully. “My dear Bella,” I said, “whatever I looked or seemed I only know this, I am not going to marry your Laird o' Cockpen—or—or anyone else,” I added with a sudden break in my voice.

Bella looked at me in silent concern, and for a moment neither of us spoke. "Have you heard," she said at last, "that Douglas Hay is away to Edinburgh to-morrow morning? I met him on his way to 'The Rowans,' to say good-bye to Mrs. Dunleith."

Every drop of blood in my body seemed to rush in a passion of strength to my heart, then slowly and coldly ebb away, leaving me white and chill as marble.

Going away—going to Edinburgh—going without a word of farewell to me! What had I done—what could it mean?

"Are you sure?" I cried faintly, thankful that the gathering darkness hid the self-betrayal of my face.

"As sure as his own words could make me," she answered. "Didn't you know? I thought he would have told you last night."

I shook my head. I did not find it easy to speak.

"From what he said," Bella continued, "I fancy he's had another row with his father. They're always disagreeing—especially when

the old man's had a break-out at the whiskey, which happens not unfrequently. Douglas seemed in a tearing rage, I know."

I was silent. What could I say? How express in any words the bitter pain—the passionate indignation—the fierce jealousy raging in my heart. He could leave me like this—he, my lover, who had sworn eternal truth—leave me with no farewell—no explanation—and yet he could find time and opportunity to go to that other woman; he could tell her of his plans; he could say good-bye to *her!*"

Rage and fury took possession of me. Every sweet and pleasant memory of Douglas Hay, of my brief love-dream, turned to gall-like bitterness. I lay back on the couch, my eyes closed—outwardly calm and indifferent, but inwardly raging with a fire and passion that almost terrified myself.

How dared he treat me so? How dared he?

So this was what came of believing in him! Of setting myself in judgment against the

opinion of my elders, of building up my own Castle of Faith in defiance of all warning—of thinking the world a Paradise of Love's own making—of throwing myself madly, impulsively, on the fair smiling waters of trust and happiness.

In all my life to come should I be haunted by this one failure? Should I know no other golden memories on which to lay my finger, saying—“Ah! I was happy then”?

Bella's voice sounded on—I never heeded it. Silent, stony—cold—so I lay there in the dusk of the fading twilight, feeling that, for me, all sweetness and glory of life had flown for ever away on the wings of a falsified faith!

CHAPTER XVIII.

“SOUNDING THE DEPTHS.”

“Had we never loved so kindly,
Had we never loved so blindly.
Never met—and never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.”

A WEEK had passed.

I had not thought a week could be so long and wearisome a space of time—that into seven days and nights, a lifetime of hope, fear, expectation, anguish, disappointment, could be crammed. Yet such was my experience.

Every morning I rose thinking, “To-day there will be a letter—everything can be explained.” Every night I laid my aching head on my pillow, and heard my sick heart throb out its misery in the silence, knowing hope was dying within me, that Douglas was only showing himself in the character that had been painted so often for me, and which I so steadily refused to believe.

Why does not Love die as swiftly as it wakens? Why does not one sharp blow of distrust and wrong kill it out of the heart and memory? Why must one still go on suffering, remembering—tortured every hour of the day by hopes that will never again be realized—by memories that are too bittersweet to be soon forgotten?

Oh! that week, that hateful, terrible week. Never again would its marks leave me; never could I rise and face life, and look at it with the same feelings, the same faith, as did that Athole Lindsay whom I had known before the first of those fatal seven days!

Oh, men! to whom a girl's love seems so light a thing—whose young life gives itself to you as the spring flowers give themselves to the wooing of the sun, when his ardour wakens them to life—do you never think what it is you do with your careless words and fickle caresses?

You meet in later years sad women, hard and bitter women, reckless women, bad women. Be very sure that it is to one such

broken faith of girlhood, one such cruel lesson as I was taught, that they owe that change. Be very sure—you whose blame is so ready, and whose judgment so harsh—that somewhere, sometime—in the far off remoteness of the past—they loved, trusted, hoped, and woke—to desolation.

And when all the sunshine is dulled, and all the beauty of the earth grown dark and sombre, and the sky is no longer blue, and the sunshine no longer golden—oh! then it is hard indeed to turn the same face to life, and accept it as we once accepted it; to try and patch up the broken faith and the soiled honour, and the frank and happy trust in innocence and truth.

Wearily must Time drag on its course, and sharp and heavy fall the blows of sorrow, ere life's great lesson of endurance is learnt—ere with humble hearts and patient eyes we can fold our hands and murmur, thankfully—“Peace is won at last.”

Joy makes no long tarrying with us. But for even its brief flashes of sun-light we learn

to be very, very thankful. Impatience and expectation are but fuel to the fires of youth. Gradually they exhaust themselves, and the fires burn with fainter, but steadier, light, till naught but ashes are left.

But, oh ! it is hard, hard, hard ! And who shall help us—and who shall know us—and who shall read the secret of the struggle and the vanity of effort ? No one—no one. Not our nearest and dearest—not even that *one* who deems he knows us best. For though all life is lonely, in a deep and saddened sense of loneliness when it fails to find sympathy and comprehension—it descends to the very deepest depths of loneliness when sorrow touches and misfortune crushes it. None can know its bitterness, or suffer with its suffering. In all that is most sad and solemn in our lives—as perhaps even in our moments of deepest joy—we are utterly and entirely alone, living out for ourselves the Fate that is the birthright of each life, and by it condemned or blessed.

So for me went on the weary days, and I

kept my secret in my heart, and did my best to be cheerful, and to accept all the simple pleasures and amusements provided for me.

We went to Glen Urquhart as arranged. The Camerons, Macphersons, Grannie and myself. The day was lovely. The views—as the steamer took us through the Canal—were like a changing panorama of beauty. Hills and plains were bathed in the clear and quiet sunshine of the perfect summer day—there was scarcely a ripple on the water, scarce a stir of bough or branch on the the wooded shores—and a faint haze covered the distant heights, and fell mistily on bush and rock and heather of the wide moorland.

A week before, and how I should have revelled in all the wild and rugged beauty that met my eyes that day! But now my heart was too heavy, and my spirits were very forced indeed, and tears were nearer to my eyes than smiles to my lips.

I have but a vague remembrance of all the places pointed out to me—of stories and legends galore related by Uncle Jamie or

Kenneth—tales of Highlanders and chieftains, and great exploits and great villainies too, and many pitying comments on my total ignorance of Scottish history.

I sat there on the deck watching the changing scenes, and listening to Kenneth as he pointed out the different points of interest. The party seemed very merry indeed. Alick Macpherson and Flora were looking supremely happy. Bella was in sympathetic converse with an elderly doctor from Inverness, who had chanced to be on the steamer, and was bound for Drumnadrochit. My aunt and Mrs. Macpherson were deeply engrossed in an interesting gossip anent their friends and acquaintances. Grannie was chatting to Uncle Jamie, and giving vent to a shocked exclamation occasionally at some broad jest or equivocal joke, on his part, respecting things sacred or moral. He loved nothing better than to shock the old lady, and some of his stories were certainly calculated to do so. To me, however, they were slightly unintelligible, as he always

related them in the very broadest Scotch, and I was not yet fully acquainted with the quaint expressions and phrases he so plentifully scattered abroad.

“ Jamie, Jamie,” I heard her say rebukingly, “ when will ye learn to conduct yourself with gravity and discretion? I’m thinking ye’re just demented.”

I looked at Kenneth. “ Your father is younger than you in spirits,” I said. “ You are twice as grave and solemn as he is.”

He glanced with disfavour at his relative, who was expatiating on some point of resemblance between “ the de'il, a Hielander, and a whisky-bottle,” which I confess I was unable to detect, and which Grannie vainly endeavoured to silence.

“ Yes,” he said, “ we are very unlike.”

“ You say that as if you were more thankful than regretful,” I said.

He looked at me. “ Life is not altogether a jest, nor always a subject for ridicule,” he said. “ My father appears to consider it is. I do not.”

“A jest!”—I shivered slightly even in the noon-day warmth. “Indeed no—it is very terribly earnest I think.”

“You cannot surely think so yet,” he said, with a quick searching glance at my face. “What can life be to you but a fairy dream—with nothing hard or sad or painful to shadow it?”

“A dream,” I said bitterly. “Yes, of course, that is all. But every dream is not pleasant.”

“Yours should be. You are so young, and life can’t have been very hard for you yet.”

“Oh,” I cried impatiently, “how sick I am of hearing that I am ‘so young.’ It forms the basis of all the lectures and advice I am perpetually receiving.”

“Don’t be so cross about it,” said Kenneth smiling. “It’s a fault we all mend of very soon. But no wonder everyone preaches it to you, for you look even younger than you are.”

“And you,” I said quickly, “seem older than you look.”

“That is a good fault for a lawyer. No one would trust a very young man with an important case. By-the-bye, do you know I am going to Edinburgh?”

“To Edinburgh?” I echoed feebly, and with that sudden sickness of heart the name and its associations always brought to me.

“Yes. I leave directly the Northern Meetings are over, and shall stay there all the winter.”

“Indeed,” I said indifferently.

What did it matter to me how long he stayed, what he did? If it had been —

I broke off sharply and impatiently. I would not allow myself to think of him. Was he not utterly faithless and unworthy?

“I mean to work very hard,” continued Kenneth, his voice very low and earnest. “I want to get on—to be independent—to make a position.”

I said nothing. I only looked at the quiet power of the face that had so little youth in it—the firm lips, the serious brow—and

thought that what he wished to do was quite possible to him.

“Don’t you agree with me?” he went on presently. “Don’t you think a man cannot begin work too early?”

“I don’t know,” I said vaguely. “I am afraid I have never thought about it all. But I suppose it is better to have a definite plan, to set some object before one, and work for it. That is the best of being a man. He can afford to fling everything aside for an ambition, or project. He can work steadily on at it till he attains it. Women must bear the monotony and dreariness of life as best they can—waiting—hoping for something that after all may never come!”

“Why do you speak so sadly, Athole? A little while back you seemed so bright and full of life. Are you less happy than you were a week ago?”

“Of course not. Why should I be?” I exclaimed quickly, angered that the colour would fly to my face before the searching glance of those grave eyes.

“That is not for me to say,” he answered. “Only just as you spoke you looked so very, very sad. You are too young to be enquiring into the ‘why and wherefore’ of life. You ought only to enjoy it.”

“That,” I said is not always possible—even with all the will to do it. Besides I am not of the temperament that accepts without question, and enjoys without effort. I am afraid I have rather a fancy for the ‘whys and wherefores’—for following everything to the vanishing point. I always had.”

“Then you will never be happy.”

I was silent. My eyes followed the track of the steamer—the long line of churned white foam that marked its course over the placid waters. The fair green land lay bathed in sunlight, and afar off the faint hills shone whitely in the noonday glow. A sort of terror came over me as I looked at all that beauty. A terror of long years to come, when my heart would ache and long and strive for forgetfulness—but strive in vain. When every day would be a landmark of pain

in my memory. When I should vainly strive to reach some higher peace or content on the wings of my broken faith. When, for the sake of this sweet Northern summertime, all other summers should seem cold and blank.

I heard Kenneth's voice sounding on and on. I paid no heed to it—only sat there with clasped hands, and eyes that watched the shores with strained, unseeing gaze. And in my heart there burnt like flame that love and longing for some word, some sign from Douglas—Douglas who had so lightly loved—so soon forgotten me.

* * * * *

It was quite late in the evening when we returned home. I was utterly tired out—so tired that as I stumbled into the little dining-room at Craig Bank, I forgot my usual enquiry as to the evening post. There were several letters on the table, and Grannie bent over and commenced examining them.

"One for you, Athole," she said, and handed me a square, boldly addressed en-

velope. I glanced at the post-mark. Edinburgh!

My heart gave one wild throb. The blood seemed to leap in a boiling flood to my brain, and for a moment the room and everything in it spun round and round in giddy circles.

Then, with a violent effort at self-command, and muttering something explanatory to Grannie about going to take off my hat, I rushed away to my room.

Breathless with joy, I looked at the envelope again. I dared not open it at once. I sank down into a chair, keeping my treasure clasped close to my throbbing heart, the glad tears rushing to my eyes.

“Oh, my darling,” I sobbed, “and you did not forget after all! How could I have wronged you so?”

Passionately I kissed the paper—he had touched it—his hand had written that address. It was no mere earthly, ordinary letter to me, but something wondrous, magical; something dropped from Paradise to make the dark earth glad and bright once more.

Then I grew calmer. I dashed the tears aside, and with trembling fingers opened the envelope at last. The letter was not very long. With a sense of disappointment I took that fact in, even before I began to read it.

There was no formal beginning. He did not address me even by my name. This was the letter :

“I had made up my mind not to write to you at all. It would have been wiser and better, but perhaps I owe you some explanation. I have been very selfish, and you very unwise. Why should I tie you down to my ill-fortunes and unlucky reputation? For I am a bad fellow, Athole. People have not lied when they told you that. Try and believe it, think the worst of me that you can. I should never have said I loved you—should never have stood in your light—but you are very young, and women so soon forget. Marry the Laird, Athole, if you are wise. He is a good man, if you like. He will be to you what I never can and never

could be. As for me — well, my father kicked me out of his house, and I am thrown on the world to sink or swim as the case may be. I suppose I shall sink. Heaven knows, a more miserable, reckless devil never breathed on the face of this earth than the fellow who now writes these lines to you ; but in all the recklessness and misery the one regret that haunts him most, is the regret that he may have made you unhappy. Think all that is bad of him, if that will help you to forget—but think he never was worth one thought of your pure and tender heart, and you will be right.

“ DOUGLAS.”

The paper fell from my nerveless hands. I seemed turned to stone.

This was all. This was the reward of my love—my tortures—my trust !

How intense the silence seemed. I could hear my heart beating with slow, strange, heavy throbs.

Oh, God ! the pain—the pain—the pain.

Had I ever suffered before? No! I had only vaguely dreamt what suffering might be. Now—I *knew*.

I don't know how long I sat there. I don't know what I did, save that now and then a low moan would startle me in the stillness, and I knew it came from my lips. And yet it sounded strange and unfamiliar, as if some one else must be there beside me some one else, not Athole Lindsay.

She—why surely she was dead. Killed in her youth and happiness—killed in her love and trust. Slain without warning, without pity, without remorse.

I remember I rose, and moved feebly to the glass, and looked with a sort of horror and wonder at myself—at my ghastly face, my tearless eyes, round which the black shadows of pain and grief had set their heavy marks.

I took the letter—the cruel letter which had robbed me of all that was best in life—every word of which seemed burnt in letters of flame on my heart. I took it and tore it

deliberately into fragments, and going to the open window I tossed them out to the cool night air. They fluttered over the ground, the wind carried them here and there, as far as the hopes they had scattered.

A knock at the door roused me. Mechanically I blew out the candle and commenced to unfasten my dress. The moon was nearly full, the whole room was flooded with its radiance.

“Are you going to bed, Athole?” said Grannie’s voice, and the old lady entered carrying a glass of milk in her hand.

“Yes,” I said with effort, “I am very, very tired,”

“Well then, I’ll no disturb ye. Indeed, I’m just wearying for bed myself. Drink this milk before ye lie down, my bairn, and now, good-night.”

She could not see my face, she noticed nothing about me in any way strange, or remarkable. Mechanically I kissed her and answered her, and with intense relief saw her leave the room and close the door.

Then my self-command seemed to forsake me. I began to tremble with a violence that shook me from head to foot. Dry, tearless sobs burst suddenly from my breast. I felt suffocating. I threw myself on my knees beside the bed the agony of thought and feeling seemed to crush me with a grasp of iron. I stretched my arms out to the darkness. What was in me of consciousness or strength struggled in some vain appeal.

“God! Have you no pity?” my dumb lips cried.

And the silence seemed suddenly filled with voices — fiendish — mocking — triumphant.

“None,” they echoed again and yet again. “None for you, oh mortal, rebellious and deceived—for you have chosen to worship a false god of your own making, and your worship makes your fate!”

CHAPTER XIX.

“ COME UNDER MY PLAIDIE.”

“ Come under my plaidie,
The night’s gaun to fa’ ;
Come in frae the cauld blast,
The drift and the snaw ;
Come under my plaidie, and sit doon beside me,
I’ll shield ye frae every cauld blast that can blaw.”

My dream had ended.

Its beginning had been sudden, so was its termination.

All through the hours of that long sleepless night I lay awake in tearless misery, battling with my shame and sorrow as best I could.

I had loved him so—and he had cared so little. He had but amused himself with me as a novelty, something to talk and jest with in idle days and hours, and I had given him all my heart—my love—my life !

I knew that so well. I knew it in the agony and self-abasement of that terrible

night—a night that left its mark on me for many a year to come—a night in which I cried for death to end my misery, feeling that never again would I care to rise and face the daylight, to hear familiar voices, to see the kindly smiling faces of my kinsfolk. A night in which I drank of my cup of humiliation to the very dregs.

I had scarcely known how I had hoped even against hope for explanation or excuse of Douglas Hay's conduct until that letter had reached me. But with it all my hopes fell shattered to the ground.

I had been wandering in a world of innocent joy, but now its sunshine was dimmed, its flowers poisoned, its beauty marred for ever.

The next morning I felt too ill to rise from bed. I pleaded my usual excuse of “headache,” and Grannie attributed it to the fatigues of the previous day. She was never fussy or troublesome, the dear old soul. She seemed to recognise that quiet was the best thing for me, and so I lay there all day in my

darkened room, with cool bandages on my burning head and cool drinks for my burning throat, and gradually my pulse grew less feverish, my head throbbed less madly—and the calm of utter weariness and utter despair stole over tortured brain and aching heart.

No one came near me but Grannie. I could not have borne it. Every sound, every voice jarred on my strained nerves—my only prayer was to be alone, quite alone.

* * * * *

There is no need to dwell at length upon this time. Almost every life has to go through some such crisis of misery at some period or another. I went through mine. I cannot tell whether it lasted long. It seemed an eternity ; but probably it could not have lasted more than that night and day, for I was up and about as usual the next morning, and to all appearance looking much as I always looked, save for those dark circles under my eyes and a little additional paleness of my never very rosy cheeks.

Pride had come to my rescue. No one

knew my secret. No one should know it. I would live my life. I would travel the road before me, but I alone should know of the knife-thrust in my heart, drawing its life-blood from it with every step of that destined journey.

"Good-bye, Douglas," I cried. "Good-bye hope—good-bye youth."

* * * * *

The days passed into weeks, the summer was nearly over now. The time for the Northern Meetings was at hand. I heard of nothing else. The little town was all astir with excitement. The dressmakers had their hands full of work.

The Camerons were to take me to the first day of the Highland Games, as Grannie did not care to go.

The day was cold and showery, and I dressed myself for the great occasion with many shivers and a growing disinclination to accompany my cousins.

However, when they all descended upon me in a cheery and excitable frame of mind,

scorning to see any threats in the gloomy clouds, or detect any chill in the rising wind, I was fain to appear cheerful too, and we all set out for the festive gathering.

The Grand Stand was cold and draughty, and the threatened rain descended just as the procession of pipers appeared on the scene with their brilliant tartans and flying ribbons.

I had grown more and more depressed as the day had gone on, and I was huddled up in my corner, shivering and melancholy, as the weird strains of the bagpipes sounded from the distance. Just then a kind and familiar voice sounded close to my ear.

“Miss Lindsay, you look so cold and chilly —do me the pleasure to accept this plaid.”

I half turned my head, and saw the Laird standing just behind me.

His kindly grey eyes, his honest concerned face, gave me a sense of pleasure and friendliness to which I had long been a stranger.

“Thank you,” I said cordially. “There’s no use denying it, Mr. Campbell, I *am* cold—horribly cold.”

The thick tartan plaid was wrapped round my shoulders immediately, and the sense of warmth and comfort it brought made me feel quite genially disposed to its owner. He leant forward and chatted away to me, explaining the gyrations of the players, the names of the clans they represented, and the tunes they played in such spirited and exhilarating fashion. Bella and Flora had recognised his proximity by this time, and Kenneth had favoured him with a somewhat distant bow—they were not within hand-shaking distance.

The rain had now evidently made up its mind to hold off no longer, and from a scattered showeriness had settled down into a good steady downpour. The sun had finally hidden his face for the day. All over the great wide expanse of sky the leaden clouds were rolling and massing themselves in a gloomy phalanx. The wind swept coldly and cheerlessly over the open ground, and even the pipers seemed to lose heart, and the proceedings were brought to a close.

There was a stampede out of the building, the rain was dripping through crevices in the roof, and the wind blew gusty showers into the faces of those occupying the front rows of seats.

Everyone looked more or less blue and damp and dismal. The Laird kept beside me, and insisted on my still wearing the warm thick plaid.

“How will ye be going home?” he asked Flora, who was looking extremely chilly and disconsolate in her thin summer dress and airy bonnet, neither of which were at all suitable to the day.

“Oh, we must have a fly and pack ourselves into it,” she said rather ill-temperedly.

“Then may I see your cousin back to Craig Bank?” he said. “I have a covered carriage here. It is quite at her service.”

“Oh, thank you,” cried Flora eagerly. “That will save us going out of our way, and will you please explain to Mrs. Lindsay——”

“Certainly—certainly,” he said, cutting

short her words, and regardless of Kenneth's scowls. As for myself I was too anxious to get home, to care how or with whom I journeyed.

We all parted somewhat hurriedly, and the Laird put me into a comfortable carriage and seated himself opposite to me, and through the now blinding rain I was driven swiftly home to Craig Bank.

Grannie was looking anxiously out of the window, and there was no small amazement visible in her face as she saw my companion.

He followed me into the house. A blazing fire gave us welcome in the dining-room, the table was laid for dinner. It was very pleasant after the cold and damp of the outer air.

I threw off the plaid and went eagerly up to the fire. I left the Laird to make his own explanations. Presently I heard Grannie urging him to take “pot-luck” and stay dinner.

He hesitated for a moment and then

accepted, only asking if he might give his coachman the necessary orders as to going back to the stables.

I thought how pleased and radiant Grannie looked, as I slowly dragged my tired and half-frozen limbs upstairs, and removed my hat and finery for the plain dark serge of every-day life.

The soup was on the table when I went down, and the Laird, grave-eyed, solemn, stolid as ever, took the chair opposite mine.

I had not seen him since the night of his proposal. He had left Inverness next day and been at his own place, Corriemoor, ever since. I listened silently as he and Grannie chatted on about all the topics of general and local interest. From time to time I caught the grey eyes looking at me with an intent, observant gaze.

I wondered whether he detected any change in my appearance. To me it seemed apparent enough. I had never been very brilliant at conversation, but now it seemed

more of an effort than ever. When he spoke to me my replies were as brief as they well could be. His presence was another stab to memory. It brought back the night of that dinner-party—the last night I had spent with my love—the last night I had seen his handsome face, and heard the ringing notes of the voice I had learnt to love so dearly. Ah, me! how long ago it all seemed, how terribly long ago!

* * * * *

Dinner was over. The rain still poured down in a steady, uncompromising fashion, and Grannie would not hear of her guest departing.

We drew up our chairs to the fire and chatted—or rather they chatted, and I listened. The Laird seemed in wonderfully good spirits. I even found myself laughing at some of his anecdotes and descriptions. Once Grannie left the room on some errand or excuse, and I found myself alone with my quondam suitor.

A momentary silence fell between us.

Then he looked at me in his direct simple fashion.

“ You are not looking well, Miss Lindsay,” he said. “ You are pale and thin; are you minded to stay on for the winter in Scotland? ”

“ I have not thought about it yet,” I said. “ Grannie seems loth to part with me; but I don’t know what my father’s wishes on the subject may be.”

He was silent for a time. “ Perhaps the air is too bleak and strong for you,” he said. “ You look as white and frail as any snowdrop. I felt just horrified when I saw you at the Meetings yonder.”

I coloured slightly at his look and tone. “ Oh,” I said lightly, “ I am well enough. Pray don’t regard me as an invalid. You know I was not very robust when I came here, but I think I have grown much stronger now.”

“ I hope so,” he said doubtfully; “ but you must excuse my saying that your looks are very unlike your words. And you are not

bright and merry as a young thing should be. Are you in any trouble? If you would but let me be a friend to you—help you—it would make me so happy.”

“ You are very kind,” I said, my voice a little tremulous, for something in his earnest face and kind grey eyes touched me deeply, “ but indeed I am quite well, as well as I shall ever be.”

“ But there *is* a trouble,” he said gently; “ I am sure of it; but I cannot press for your confidence, Miss Lindsay. I have no right to it—I wish I had.”

I was silent. A feeling of embarrassment sprang up between us, and I began to wish heartily for Grannie’s return. I glanced at the window; the day was rapidly closing in, the dull grey rain and mist made the prospect very dismal.

His eyes followed mine.

“ I am staying at the hotel for a few days,” he said, “ I arrived last night. I suppose it is about time for me to take my leave now.”

He rose and walked to the window and stood for a moment there, looking out at the wet trees and the sodden ground. I also rose and fetched the plaid which he had lent me, and laid it on the table.

“Will you take this?” I asked hesitatingly.
“Or shall I send it to the hotel?”

He turned quickly, and glanced from the wrap to me. “You have greatly honoured me by wearing it, Miss Lindsay. From this time it is a possession of value to me. I will take it myself unless—unless——”

I looked at him enquiringly, a little conscious flush rising to my face.

“Unless you would still further honour me by keeping it,” he said at last, making a vigorous effort to appear natural and unconstrained. “In memory of some slight service it has done you,” he added in a lower key.

I felt somewhat embarrassed; the plaid was a very handsome one of his own tartan, but I scarcely liked to accept it as a gift from him under the circumstances.

“ You are very good,” I stammered, blushing furiously as I met his eyes. “ But I—I don’t like—I mean I think Grannie would hardly like me to accept such a handsome present from you.”

“ I am not asking your grandmother’s opinion,” he said somewhat sternly. “ I only wish for yours. Will you not accept it in the same spirit in which it is offered, and for sake of—someone who cares very dearly for you, although he knows he is but a fool for his pains.”

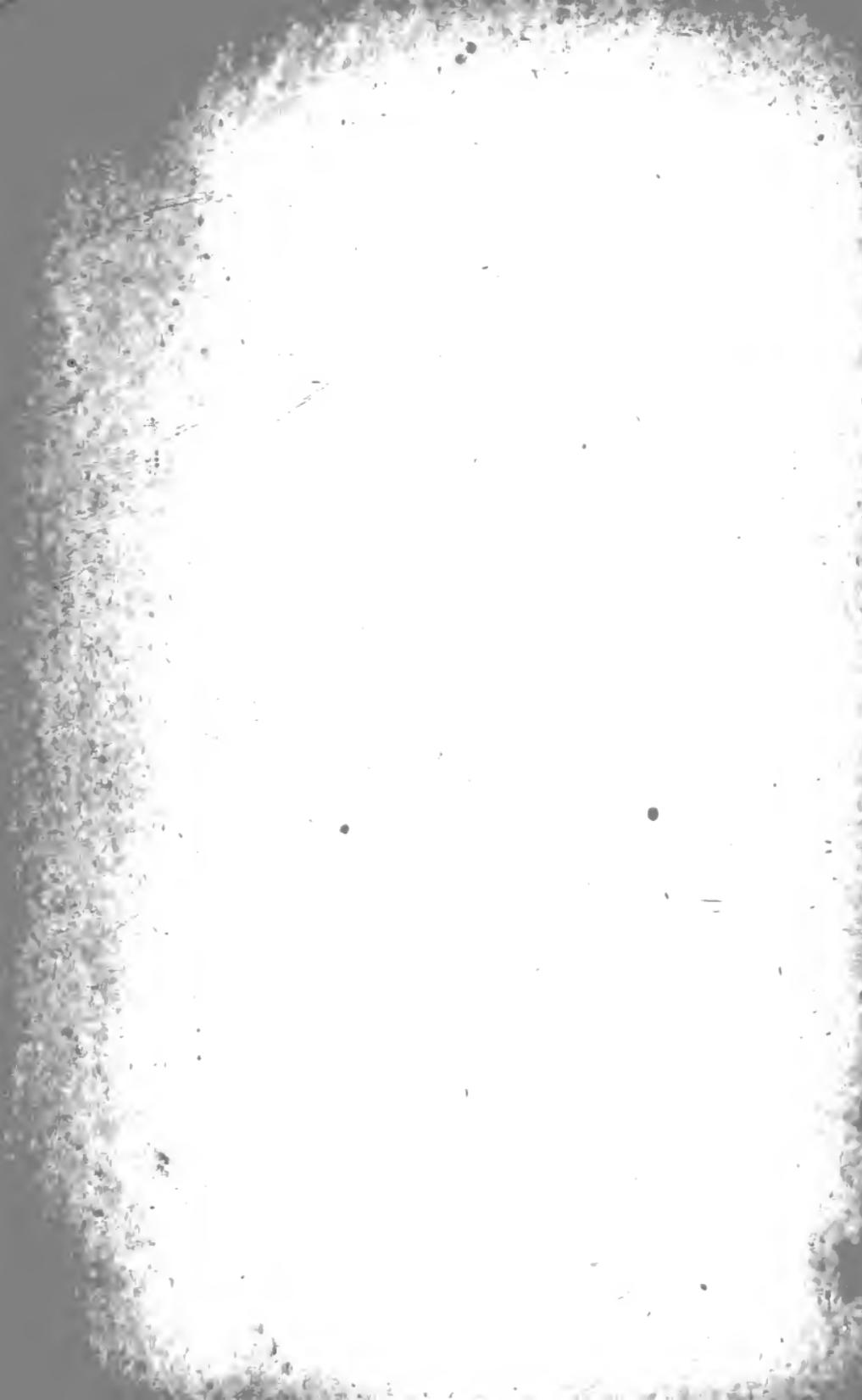
“ I—I am sure you are not a fool,” I exclaimed eagerly, “ and certainly I will accept your gift in the spirit you offer it. It is most kind of you, and I think I should have caught my death of cold to-day had it not been for that plaid.”

He was still standing by the window, his face slightly averted.

“ Do you remember the old song ? ” he said somewhat hesitatingly. “ I fear that is very much how I felt to-day. Oh, Athole, if I could only tell you how much you are to me

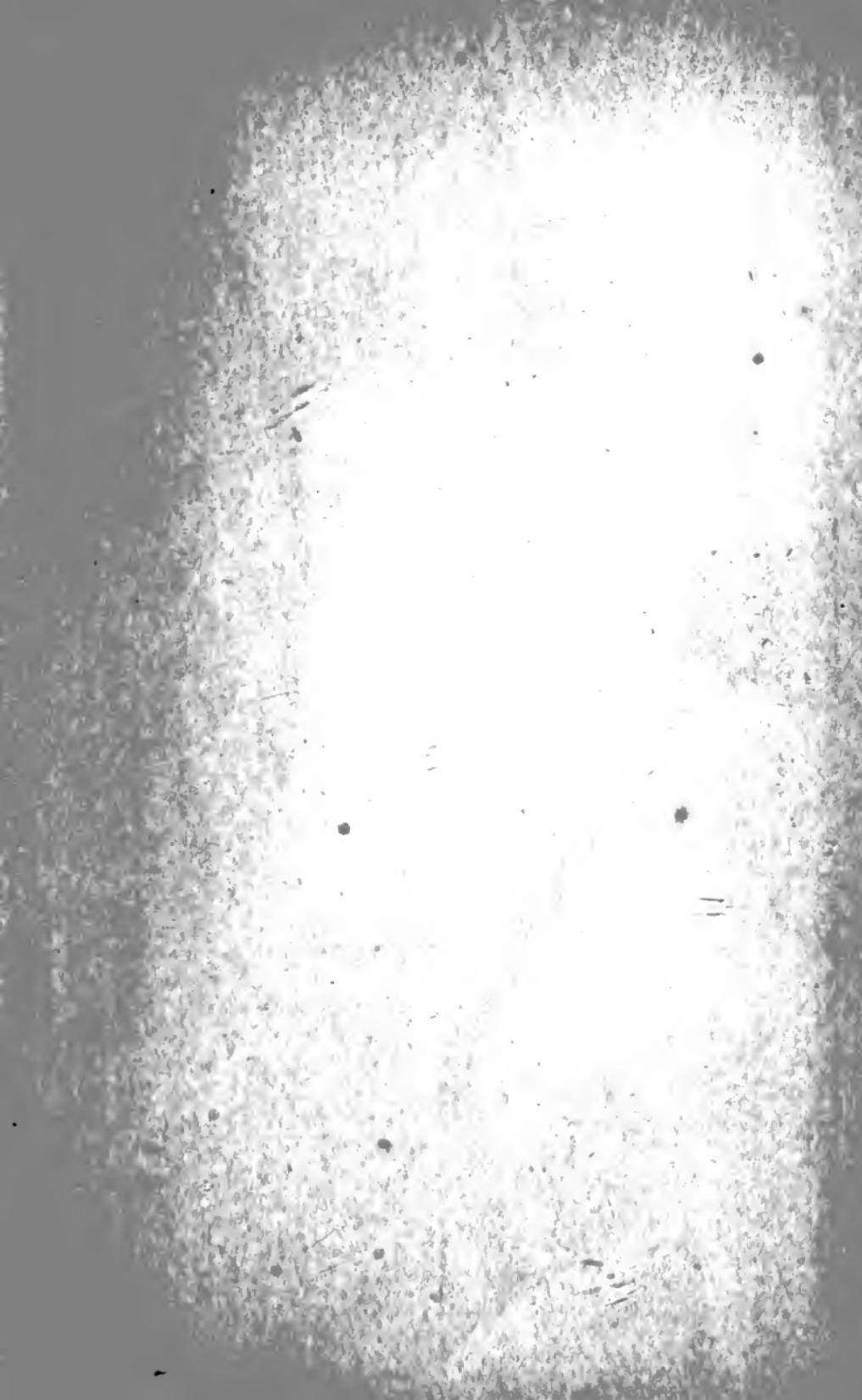
—how gladly I would shield you from ‘every cauld blast that may blaw’; every hardship, every trouble—nay, there—it is no use—we will speak of it no more.”

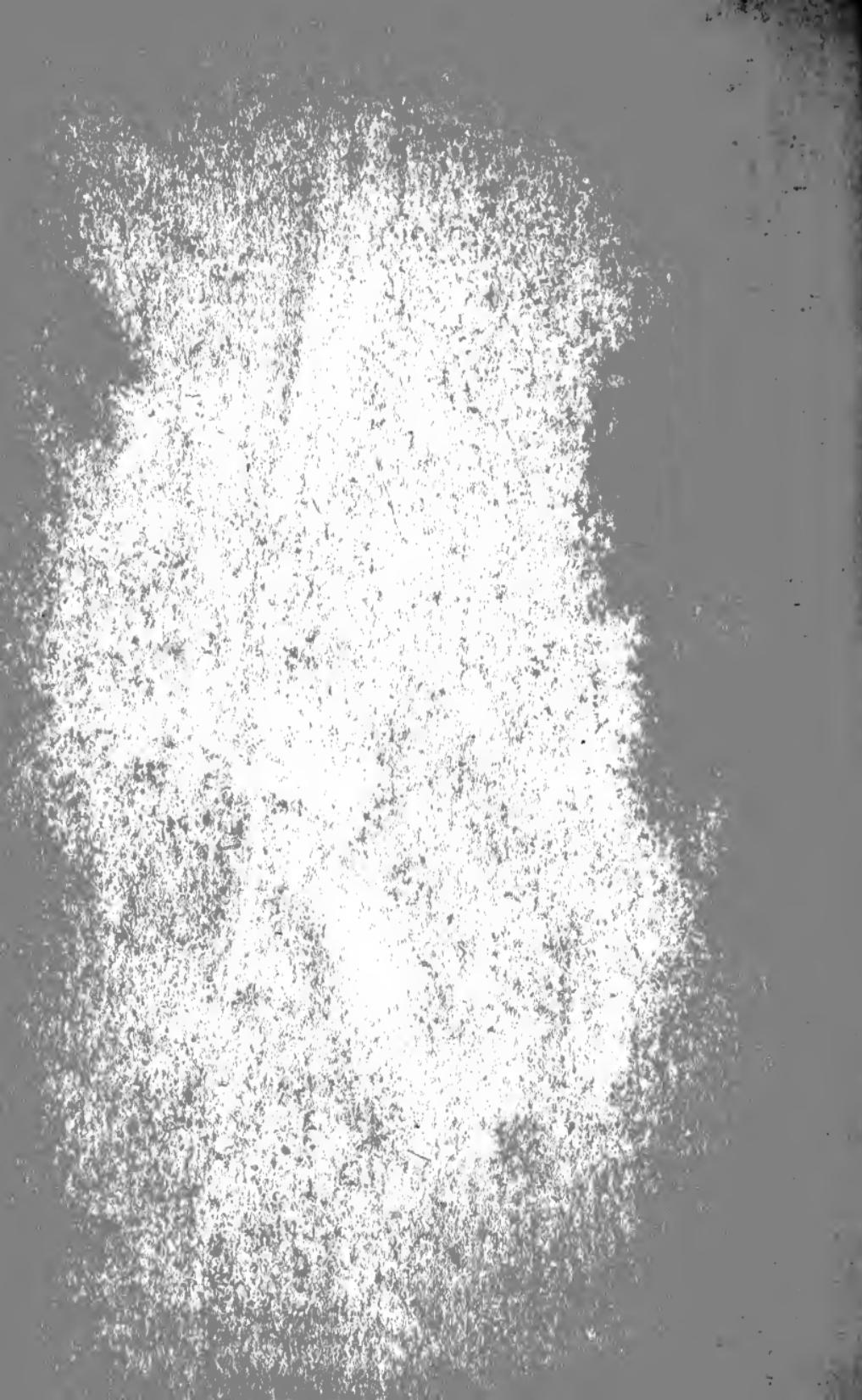
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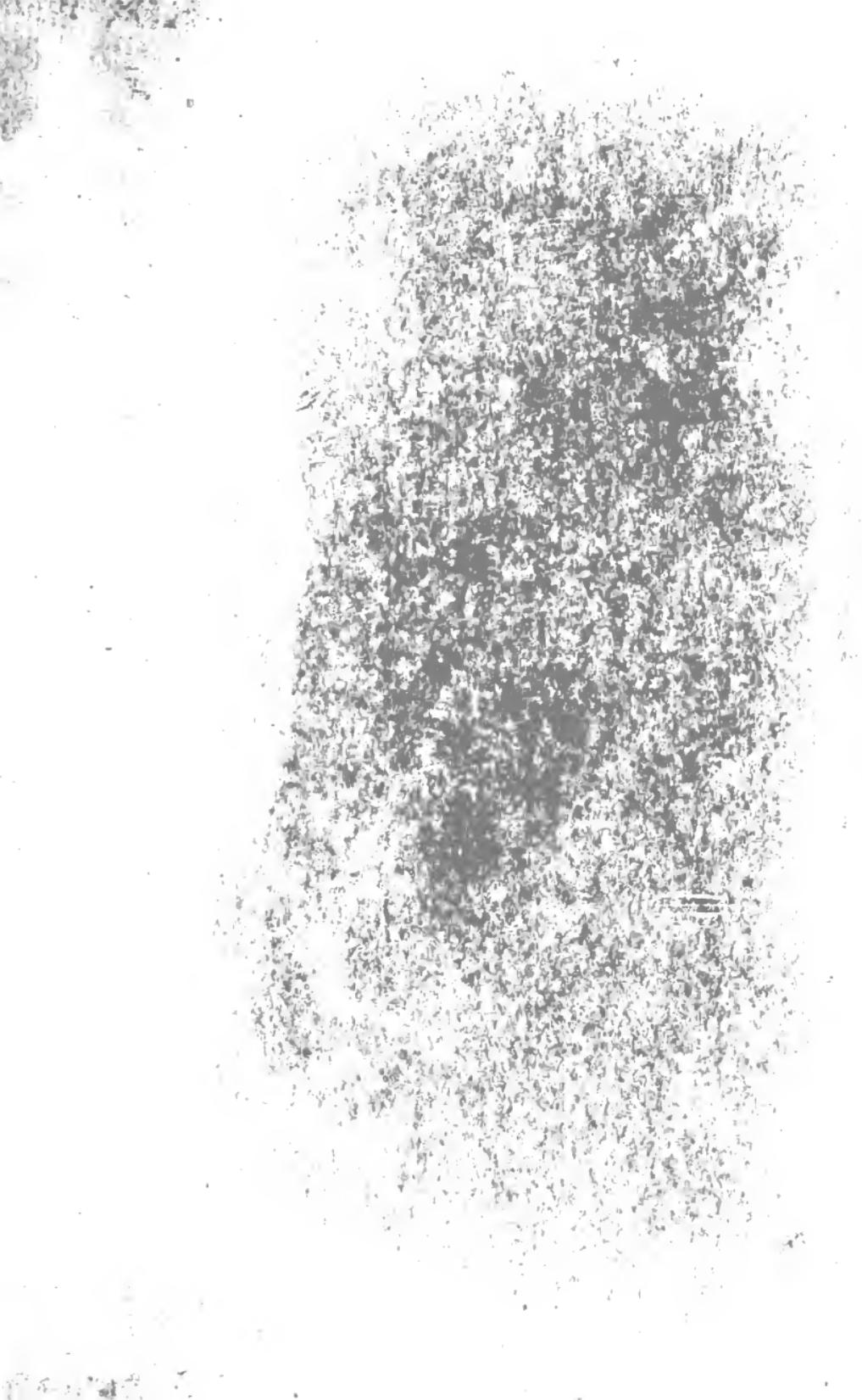


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